



*Critical Humanities Across Cultures*

# SITES OF LEARNING AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

## AGAINST NORMATIVITY

Vivek Dhareshwar



# Sites of Learning and Practical Knowledge

This book examines the relationship between cultural difference and practical knowledge and its implications for the study of humanities and the social sciences.

It sketches a meta-theory of Western thought to grasp the conceptual distortions that result when a normatively structured theoretical way of understanding the world seeks to displace practical forms of understanding. The book draws on both Western thinkers such as Nietzsche, Marx, Wittgenstein and Foucault and Indian thinkers such as Gandhi, Tagore and Balagangadhara to formulate a practical epistemology that delimits theoretical knowledge by regenerating experiential knowledge that was the hallmark of Indian intellectual traditions and provides the intellectual resources for rejecting normativity. By thus preparing the ground for a radical reconceptualization of the human sciences it seeks to overcome the loss of concepts and the violence generated by the grafting of ill-understood and experience-occluding normative conceptual structures on the fabric of practical life. Finally, the author offers an alternative conceptualization of Indian sociality through the idea of a practical matrix, which explains both why the West necessarily misunderstood or misdescribed India and how that misdescription enables us to theorize the West.

Part of the Critical Humanities Across Cultures series, this book will be an essential read for scholars and researchers of philosophy, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, Indian studies, and literature.

**Vivek Dhareshwar** is currently engaged in building a platform for learning and teaching called Indian Slate ([www.indianslate.in](http://www.indianslate.in)). He was scholar-in-residence at Srishti Institute for Art, Design and Technology, Bengaluru. He was also a co-founder, senior fellow and (for a time) Director of the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bengaluru. His main research interest is in developing a practical epistemology of Indian thought.

## Critical Humanities Across Cultures

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This series initiates and invites two related paths of inquiry: first, to unravel the assumptions that govern European account about itself and through them its representations of other cultures like the Indian (Asian or African); and second, to risk and open up inquiries into reflective practical traditions of ‘non-European’ cultures which sustained a certain cultural reflective integrity in their locations and spread it beyond. Such an inquiry helps in responding to the contemporary crises in several domains such as ethics, art, caste, action, justice, science, university, the human and the question of living together with difference. The series is open to contributions that engage with the interface between Europe and non-Europe—cultures that faced colonialism—across the disciplines and media without alibi.

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# Sites of Learning and Practical Knowledge

## Against Normativity

Vivek Dhareshwar

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# Preface

This book is my attempt to look at the world our way. My intellectual concerns changed radically after my engagement with Balagangadhara's '*The Heathen in his Blindness...: Asia, the West and the Dynamics of Religion* (*Heathen* henceforth throughout the book). It had a profound effect on me *experientially*, posing the question of decolonization as an urgent, existentially immediate and necessary task. The extraordinary thing about *Heathen* was the way it grabbed hold of my intuitions, clarifying the deep sense of inarticulate dis-ease I had always felt about my intellectual concerns and showing the riches that awaits one if one begins the arduous but exciting task of articulating how the world might look to us if we begin to describe it by accessing our own experience. We owe an immense debt to the author and the work for making possible a new, very Indian, phase in the adventure of knowledge. Who does the "we" index? Immediately and obviously Indian intellectuals, but as *Heathen* and the present book will make clear, it needs must index Asians and, this may be counter-intuitive to the contemporary intellectual milieu, European intellectuals. For the new Indian adventure holds out the possibility of an entirely new, thoroughly decolonized human sciences but not only for Indians! So, the debt we owe is a cultural debt, but by the same token, the author of *Heathen* would no doubt say that the insight of that work was made possible by the learning process of Indian culture and what it learned from the West, and hence, the work is a gift of both cultures and we need to learn to receive that gift.

Since my encounter with *Heathen*, the intellectual quest became one of understanding what it is to reflect on experience and how to "theorize" practical form of life and practical knowledge. Since the deepest damage colonialism did to Indians was to render our own experience alien to us, we had no language except the language and the terms provided by Western intellectual traditions or their orientalist counterparts to describe our world. This was/is deeply ironical because the sole preoccupation of Indian intellectual traditions was "experience" or *anu-bhava*. From *Heathen*, it becomes clear why our traditions have become inaccessible to us and thus learning to reflect on experience or to understand practical form of life is at the same time a process of de-colonization. People who hear the phrase reflection on experience or

practical knowledge have a tendency to demand immediate clarification of the terms, often asking for definitions of them, as though that can actually be done or even if one were to offer some initial provisional clarification that would help in any way in the larger task, namely, accessing the Indian intellectual traditions and, what is for me another description of the same task, reconceptualizing the human sciences. I, therefore, request the reader to be patient when she encounters phrases such as “experience,” “reflection on experience,” “experiential knowledge,” “practical knowledge,” “action-knowledge,” or “performative knowledge.” It may seem they are used interchangeably; indeed, they are for purposes of clarifying the different facets of the “practical.” I will also be speaking of practical philosophy, practical epistemology, and with Aristotelians, “phronetic knowledge.” The task is the daunting one of understanding a certain way of going about in the world, a form of life, the practical form of life. The argument is that secularization, and subsequently orientalization and colonization, has distorted this form of life and warped our understanding of it. None of the concepts or processes involved, therefore, can be given a quick, definitional clarification. Such attempts are futile and tend to be purely verbal. Understanding will emerge, clarification will be achieved, as we progress through the chapters. However, despite the deep unity of the concerns orchestrated in the book, I believe each chapter can be read independently; it goes without saying, of course, that reading in the arranged order (which is also their chronological order) will make possible the conceptual determinations to be richer and the grasp of the arguments to be deeper.

The central argument of the book is that if we take cultural difference seriously, we will need to radically reconceptualize the humanities and the social sciences. Taking cultural difference seriously involves understanding how practical knowledge structures forms of life. The different chapters of the book show how this argument allows us a deeper understanding of both the colonial encounter and the post-colonial political and cultural conundrums faced by India (and other post-colonial nations): rather than harp on the so-called Eurocentricity of the human sciences, this book makes the case for how we need to build a meta-theory of Western “theories” to grasp the conceptual distortions that necessarily arise when a theoretical way of understanding the world seeks to displace practical forms of understanding. The normative structures that arise in this process occlude practical or experiential knowledge. The corollary of this argument is equally important for throwing light on the post-colonial predicament: inheriting the normative framework has meant the post-colonial intelligentsia has simply carried on the social reform agenda of the colonizers in different domains of life, the result being loss of concepts on the one hand and the violence generated by the grafting of ill-understood normative conceptual structures on the fabric of practical life, on the other. This abstract and philosophical argument is fleshed out with concrete examples and analysis. A new concept, *practition*, is introduced and elaborated to get a handle on how practical form of life needs to be understood. Through an analysis of Gandhi’s concepts and

practice, the book shows how practical or experiential knowledge had found expression in anti-colonial struggles. The distortions resulting from theoretical knowledge supplanting practical learning is registered through a fresh reading of Marx, Foucault, and Gandhi. Finally, the book offers an alternative conceptualization of Indian sociality through the idea of a practical matrix, which explains both why the West necessarily misunderstood or misdescribed India and how that misdescription enables us to theorize the West. To sum up: the book (1) explains why attempt a meta-theory of Western theories; (2) outlines how normativization of domains of practical life in India distorted its culture; (3) initiates a de-colonized understanding of Indian intellectual traditions as a prelude to a new Humanities and as the only way of resisting normativity.

Ever since my intense involvement in a Leftist group in Bangalore in my late teens, which formed me intellectually, I have always shared my intellectual excitements—whether discovering a new thinker, school, or a new insight or argument—with those close to me; indeed, such sharing had made the friendships richer. It was no different when I encountered *Heathen* and, as I mentioned above, my engagement with it initiated a deep questioning of my concerns, its underpinnings, and glimpses of new insights opened up for me. This time, however, my attempt to share my excitements about *Heathen* and the intellectual prospect of a new but decolonized understanding of both the West and ourselves, rather than enthusing those close to me, as my earlier sharing had done, began tangibly to alienate them. I could understand the initial resistance to the novel idea of decolonization on the part of most Leftist intellectuals who only understood the Marxian sort of critique of colonialism; but it was incomprehensible to me why most/all of them could not take what I thought was the logical step. Instead, all/most of them moved away from me, preferring no doubt to value their stakes in the self-understanding provided by varieties of post-Marxist Western or American academic trends, rather than pursue some distant goal of a meta-theory of the West and a decolonized understanding of India. (The shallow and misguided alibi that this actually is some turn to the political right seemed, disappointingly, to comfort them. I hope it did, anyway: something to conceal or assuage the failure of intellectual nerve.)

I mention this autobiographical matter for it indexed what turned out to be a widespread response from Indian intellectuals of all political stripes. Understanding this response too became part of my engagement with the theoretical and practical consequences of *Heathen*, and the book does, if only implicitly, provide such an understanding. More than ever, I am convinced that the step I took was logical and that my intellectual trajectory has a unity that in some form or the other will be the experience of Indian intellectuals. I hope this effort will make clear why the narrative epistemology of detour must lead to a practical epistemology of *retour* or return! (Since I can only show the narrative unity from the vintage of the understanding achieved, the concluding chapter finds a place for their intersection.) Chapter 1 lays out the

larger argument, drawn from *Heathen*, outlining secularization as a dynamic of religion, exploring in detail the idea of practical knowledge or practical way of going about the world through a discussion of Wittgenstein's later work, and establishes the link between secularization and normativity through a discussion of Nietzsche and Foucault. I show how *Heathen* gives a more convincing explanation of the phenomenon of orientalism than Edward Said, whose eponymous work brought this strange phenomenon to our attention. *Heathen* demonstrates that we need to take the seemingly counter-intuitive idea seriously, namely, Western descriptions of India tell us more about the West, about the culture of the described than about India, the object of description. Taking my cue from that demonstration, I argue for the construction of meta-theory of Western "theories" about itself and other cultures as a prerequisite for the decolonized description of Indian culture. *Heathen* teaches us to see cultures as configurations of learning, audaciously locating learning and knowledge at the heart of culture; using this hypothesis to understand the West and India would mean building a theory of cultural difference which explains that difference in terms of the dominance of a particular mode of learning, particular way of going about in the world. According to this conceptual story, Christianity as a religion generates a theoretical way of going about the world as its dominant mode, subordinating the practical mode of learning to its structure. Indian culture, on the other hand, is characterized by the practical or performative mode of going about in the world, where theoretical learning plays a subordinate role. The task of providing a decolonized understanding of India would, then, involve describing the practical form of life, while at the same time constructing a meta-theory of Western "theories" to show how the Western description of India, orientalism, had to provide a distorted understanding of the practical form of life, inventing in the process entities such as "Hinduism" and "the caste-system." I call them "ontologically peculiar entities," whereas Balagangadhara terms them "hipkapis," the abracadabra that vividly brings out the purely imagined nature of these entities. The difference in terminology will turn out to be more than mere notational variation: what underlies it, it will turn out, is a very different conception of practical knowledge. This chapter, thus, sets out all the themes and the questions as well as the conceptual ingredients needed to understand the terms of their articulation and possible resolution; all of which will receive more concrete and detailed treatment in the subsequent chapters. This chapter also constructs the all-important template of normativity (as we might call it for convenience) which will play a critical role in all the chapters (thus it may seem that there's some amount of repetition, but which in reality is a way of adding richer determinations to the argument). The large questions this chapter will enable to formulate are: what is the relationship between colonialism and orientalism? If normativity structures both orientalism and the human sciences, how do we understand the relationship between orientalism and the human sciences? Are human sciences to be seen entirely as expressing the dynamic of secularization or do they also provide insights into that dynamic,

as clearly the “pagan” thinkers we have engaged with here testify? Why does normativity deform practical knowledge? Is “hipkapi” the same as the ontologically peculiar entity? How does theorization stand in relation to practical reflection or experiential knowledge?

New practical resources will emerge in Chapter 2 with my reading of Gandhi—in fact, Gandhi will figure prominently in Chapters 3, 4, and 6 too. Gandhi, I argue, not only enables us to have a deeper sense of the violence of colonialism but shows us how Indian intellectual traditions provide us with the resources to set up sites of learning, which he himself used in an exemplary way to fashion the practice of non-violent *satyagraha* to overcome the violence of colonialism. In many ways, Chapter 2 contains all the important practical concerns developed in the book. It especially seeks to foreground the nature of politics and how implicated it is in creating what I call the “normative zone.” The arguments developed in this chapter will be used in Chapter 3 to theorize, on one hand, the idea of two frames that seem to structure the contemporary experience of Indians and to introduce, on the other, the concept of practitioner to capture the practical mode of going about in the world in India. The notion of cognitive enslavement gets fleshed out when we see the presence of the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame in our midst; at the same time, we register the mute but still powerful presence of the actional frame that Gandhi was trying to render vibrant again with his idea of *satyagraha* and sites of learning and which I am conceptualizing as practitionerial matrix. We also see the distortions that practical form of life undergoes when the quasi-cognitive frame is brought to understand it by Indian intellectuals (Bimal Matilal trying to find moral dilemma in *the Gita* and Partha Chatterjee seeking “political society” and “civil society” in slums and localities of the rich, respectively). A relaxed treatment of the great Gandhi–Tagore debate rehearses both the “frames” idea and the “practitioner” idea in greater detail and depth, showing how these two great minds probed our relation to both Western and Indian concepts. In Chapter 5, I use the work of Marx and Foucault to understand the process of secularization in Europe; the question of what happens to “spirituality” (“experiential knowledge”) in that process helps us glimpse the violence involved in the normativization of domains of practical life (something Gandhi had sensed too). Gathering all the threads developed in Chapters 2, 3, 4, Chapter 6 explicitly poses the question of ethical action in the face of experience-occluding structures that secularization brings forth. Contrasting critique and genealogy with Gandhian attempt to revitalize practical knowledge by drawing on Indian thought, I argue that our life with concepts must resume the inquiries present in Indian traditions. Chapter 7 continues that exercise by making more explicit the use of Indian thought to understand our present which is characterized by parasitism of all sorts, including, tragically, intellectual parasitism. The concluding chapter takes up again the central question of the relationship between theory and practical reflection; the answer proposed involves a radically new understanding of the character of Indian thought.

With the help of Michael Thompson's *phronetic* epistemology, which animates his refreshing practical philosophy, I argue that logical (understood in the broadest sense) character of Indian thought derives from the nature of the concepts it has developed: they are form-concepts rather than theoretical concepts. The chapter shows the implication of this consideration not only for how we can employ and develop concepts of Indian thought but for resolving many other problematics treated in the course of the book: how to rethink the structure of practical knowledge and how that calls for revision of the theory of cultural difference; why we need a theory of categorial error rather than Ryle's category mistake to properly understand what religion/normativity does to practices and practical knowledge; and, therefore, why my notion of an ontologically peculiar entity is the right account of the outcome of the categorial error; finally, why resisting normativity requires the revitalization of practical reflection, which in turn involves actively thinking with and developing Indian concepts by standing in the logical space of practices. We can, and must, resume our life with those concepts.

(Given the argument this book is making regarding the nature of Indian thought and its concepts, it would defeat the purpose of that argument to provide the customary glossary of terms. The context of discussion itself provides the clarification.)

## Acknowledgments

For about a decade from 1996, when I participated in a review symposium on *Heathen*, my intellectual energy went into thinking through the new horizons the work was opening up; looking back on that period of great excitement and discovery, I am struck by how most of what I thought about or the projects I initiated was done in continuous conversation with Balagangadhara (or Balu as he is familiarly known), mostly in Bangalore, but also in Ghent, Belgium. It is difficult to capture the relationship I had with him in any one word so I will not try. I have already mentioned the debt we as a culture owe him and his work. Personally, the conversations and notes he periodically produced (especially in the early 2000s, most of them unpublished and conceived as early sketches for a projected book on ethics, which, alas, has not appeared yet), the *yahoo* forum in which, for decades, he tirelessly educated whoever wanted to be educated on what it is to do research in the human sciences, these have shaped my concerns and, especially, my preoccupation with practical or experiential knowledge. I use the past tense to talk about that relationship, mainly to make clear that he should not be (and, of course, he would not want to be) associated with the positions and formulations found in this book. Otherwise, the use of the tense itself does not say much (and, as this work hints, the action universe knows of a different temporality); I probably need to understand the significance of why the well-known verse from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* has the line *mā vidvisāvahai*, something that will no doubt become clear when my thinking with Indian concepts acquires greater depth.

My engagement with *Heathen* and the consequent intellectual reorientation overlapped with my involvement with the founding of the research institute, Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore. Thanks to the kind of space created there, I was able to simultaneously teach the entirely novel set of issues I was researching. The intensity and excitement of those years were made possible, in large part, by the courage, commitment, and keen intelligence of a group of young scholars: Dunkin Jalki, Meera Ashar, Polly Hazarika, Sufiya Pathan, Elizabeth Thomas, and Geetanjali Srikantan. A.P. Ashwin Kumar and Shashikala Srinivasan have continued to be active interlocutors; a special thanks to Shashikala for her attentive reading of the manuscript and for her suggestions for its revision.

I must thank Akeel Bilgrami for many delightful and stimulating conversations over the years about Marxism, Gandhi, philosophy in general (and cricket, of course). Listening to the early version of his celebrated paper on Gandhi which he gave in a conference I had organized in Bangalore in 2000 on “the Human Sciences and the Asian Experience” led me to make Gandhi an integral part of my inquiry.

Venkat Rao has been a wonderful friend and collaborator, always thinking up new ways to take our concerns forward. It is fitting therefore that this work appears in his “Critical Humanities” series.

Conversations with Dilip da Cunha about his conception of design inquiry which has led him to contrast rain terrain and river thinking has made me realize its affinity with my practices. His design inquiry may well be one of the rare contemporary idioms of practical knowledge.

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## Source of Previous Publications

Chapter 1 draws some material from two of my previous publications: “The Trial of Pagan,” *Cultural Dynamics*, 8:2, July 1996, 115–118.

“Valorizing the Present: Orientalism, Postcoloniality and the Human Sciences,” *Cultural Dynamics*, 10:2, July 1998, 211–231.

Chapter 2 appeared under the same title in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLV: 2010, March 20–26. <https://epw.in/journal/2010/12/special-articles/politics-experience-and-cognitive-enslavement-gandhis-hind-swaraj>

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Vivek Dhareshwar (2012) Framing the Predicament of Indian Thought: Gandhi, the *Gita*, and Ethical Action, *Asian Philosophy*, 22:3, 257–274, DOI: 10.1080/09552367.2012.709419. <https://www.tandfonline.com/>

Vivek Dhareshwar (2016) Marx, Foucault, and the Secularization of Western Culture, Rethinking Marxism, 28:3–4, 354–366, DOI: 10.1080/08935696.2016.1243421. copyright © Association for Economic and Social Analysis reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com> on behalf of Association for Economic and Social Analysis.

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An early version of Chapter 6 appeared as “Understanding the ‘Semblance of Objectivity’: Critique, Genealogy and Ethical Action,” in *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2:11 (June 2018), 31–49.

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# 1 Meta-Theory, Practical Knowledge, and Normativity

Once more, pagans will testify in a battle about religious truth.

(S.N. Balagangadhara, 1994: 485)

In what language do we valorize the present? What does it mean to valorize the present? This is not as simple as it may appear, for the question of our present, of our time, has not been posed, let alone thematized. To set out that agenda in the broadest possible terms:

- 1 Constructing a language to valorize our present involves formulating a collective research project in such a way that our experience – cultural and historical – is constitutive of that project. The significance of the latter will emerge in due course.
- 2 Valorizing our present is at the same time a theoretical rejection of the West.
- 3 Theoretical rejection of the West involves constructing a meta-theory of Western theories.

The way we go about constructing the meta-theory, i.e., the way we specify the intelligibility condition for the problems that Western theories grapple with must make clear that Western theories are rejected not because they are Western but because they fail to provide knowledge. In other words, the rejection, far from excluding or negating the Western experience (which would be a symmetrical inversion of the negation of the experience of the non-Western cultures by the Western theories), would make that experience “theoretically” intelligible for the first time.

- 4 The construction of the meta-theory of Western theories is at the same time an attempt to describe ourselves. We cannot attempt the latter without undertaking the former.
- 5 It is only when we begin to describe or theorize our own experiences that valorizing the present can become a viable practical task. (The “we” and “our” indexes, I have reason to hope, not only the place I come from.)

## 2 Meta-Theory, Practical Knowledge, and Normativity

In the rest of this chapter, I shall try to elucidate the five items of the agenda by advancing and defending a general thesis that will provide the abstract and systematic frame for outlining the agenda. Here then is the proposition I want to argue: *our present is the difference between Western theories of ourselves (of which our existing theories of ourselves are but an extension) and our meta-theory of Western theories (of which their theories of our part of the world are but a component)*. We will need to nuance and qualify this as we go along, but the project contained in that proposition is what I wish to outline. The first half of the proposition, I take it, presents no special problem of understanding. Whether we take our social systems or cultural practices, what descriptions we have of them are generated by the West's attempt to explain a world that it saw as distinctly different from its own (without, however, succeeding in that task). I use the word "explain" judiciously: these theories saw Indian culture ("the caste-system," the bewildering "Hindu religious practices") as a phenomenon to be explained; they did not, indeed they could not, see it as something to be learned. And we have been using those theories to describe ourselves, not without, it must be said, great intellectual discomfort or experiential distress. The result, unsurprisingly enough, has been that in a profound sense what we *say* and what we *experience* have radically diverged from one another, or have the most tenuous relationship with one another. This unhappy apprenticeship has lasted a long time; it is time now to ask what we make of it. I think most people would have an intuitive understanding of the divergence I have spoken of and some may even think up an example or two articulating that intuition. If you do, then we are well on our way to discussing a collective project. For, paradoxical as it may seem at first sight, the task of building a meta-theory of Western theories is part of the effort to articulate theoretically this sense of divergence. If you do not share my intuition, holding, however implausibly, either that the West has all the truth, about itself as well as us, or that our tradition already has all the wisdom needed, then I hope at least that you will want those convictions proved theoretically. The project I outline does not in any way prejudge the result. That such an inquiry could be at least proposed today has something to do with the fact that, from very diverse routes, intellectuals (at least in India, but I suspect this to be the case elsewhere in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean) have come to recognize that the project of modernity in our part of the world has been premised on a *denial* or even a *rejection* of our experience. A lot needs to be said about the forms this recognition has taken; my proposal will, however, presuppose, more or less, such a recognition or acknowledgment as a fact and address the issue of the shape and the scope of the inquiry that the recognition makes possible.

### Roads Taken and Not Taken Since Orientalism

The awareness of the divergence between what we say and what we experience, which provides the point of departure for these reflections, was in no

small measure due to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The great merit of this work was to estrange, in one stroke, the familiarity and even naturalness of a whole body of discourses that had seemingly been part of our self-description. It did so by the apparently simple method of pointing to the vast body of discourses about the "Orient"—missionary writings, travelers' narratives, administrators' reports, scholarly and imaginative works produced by Europe. The striking thing about this body of discourses was its "textualizing" attitude, its inter-textuality, and consistency (its "sheer knitted-together quality" despite the temporal and spatial dispersal of the authors). The other important feature was the hallucinatory quality of even the most empirical of these discourses; it was as though essential truths about the Orient were always known and that the empirical studies, travelers' impressions, administrators' reports were simply confirming these truths. There were of course stereotypes about the "inferior races," again very limited and very insistent. All this led Said to argue (1978: 42) that "Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon, and limitations of, thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine." What exactly does that mean? How does Said propose to theorize this phenomenon? Although Said does make many suggestions, some of them very incisive, it must be admitted that there is really no attempt in that work to theorize the phenomenon it so dramatically brings to our notice. Said does say that orientalist discourse says more about the culture that produced it than about the cultures that it describes; he also insists that orientalism should not be conflated with colonialism, although he himself seems more interested in showing how orientalist discourse legitimated colonialism. I am not by any means suggesting that the interaction between orientalist discourse and colonialism is not a legitimate or important field of study. On the contrary, but I do want to argue that even that problematic—much studied by post-colonial discourse—can be productively explored only when we have a *characterization* of orientalism. Before exploring that question, let me briefly sketch the trajectory of post-Orientalism discourse, especially post-colonial theory/discourse. This will be a polemical sketch in that its intent is to show the impasse that the problematic of post-coloniality leads to.

The very demarcation of orientalism as a discourse with certain identifiable features had an enormous impact on several domains. The reason was obvious: one could now see the very same orientalist features and strategies at work in nationalist discourse, in contemporary social sciences (especially history, anthropology, sociology), in the policies of post-colonial states and so forth. This realization produced a whole spate of studies which tracked orientalist knowledges in the colonial archives and produced accounts which purported to show Western (but also colonial and nationalist) constructions of  $x$ , where  $x$  could be caste, criminal tribe, tradition, sexuality, communalism, race, suttee, etc. Another type, more common in anthropology, began to find representation itself problematic, although it could never make clear whether the ground for that was epistemological, moral/political, or linguistic. Yet

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another type of discourse, perhaps the one that gets designated as post-colonial, developed Saidian concerns toward a critique of the West (or critique of modernity or of Enlightenment reason); this discourse can be read as an attempt either to develop a narrative of resistance to modernity and to its construction of a tradition/modernity dichotomy or to offer a story of “alternative modernities” or even “indigenous modernities” (they are not necessarily opposed, since resistance could also be interpreted as creative assimilation or modification of imposed structures). Pluralizing “modernity” and desperately adding adjectives to it has hardly clarified what that original thing was/is; it has simply permitted repackaging of orientalism in the “theory” jargon current in the American academia.

What I have sketched is an idealized description—indeed, it is not difficult to find works which combine constructivism, skepticism (again moral/epistemological) regarding representation and critique of modernity. The naivest among the three is the first in that it simply evades any sort of theoretical issues and claims simply to analyze orientalist discourse. It is not surprising, therefore, to find among the first type works which are orientalist at one remove. By that I do not mean that they study orientalism at one remove, which is what they claim to do, but that they *are* orientalist at one remove. If the orientalist discourse was hallucinatory, despite its attempt to describe some empirical object or other, some of the post-orientalist scholarship displays the same hallucinatory quality precisely because it attempts to evade what the orientalists confronted. Thus, for example, some of the post-orientalist works purport to demonstrate how orientalism denied agency to Indians, implying obviously that that was a wrong or at any rate bad thing to do. How do they plan to make good this deficiency? Surely not by making Indians look like Kantian subjects! They evade this question because this would require first-order, object-level theorizing, and if they actually do that, the chances are they will replicate orientalist discourse. In fact, some of the prominent post-orientalist scholars (both Indian and Western) working on India do in fact recycle the typically orientalist positions when they analyze the contemporary problem of “communal conflict” or “caste politics.” Since most of these scholars also situate themselves in the critique-of-modernity camp, they would inevitably argue against secularism on the ground—believe it or not—that India is deeply religious, that religion suffuses its fabric so deeply and widely that it is doing violence to this fabric to impose secularism on it!<sup>1</sup>

The most striking feature of both Said’s work and the post-orientalist scholarship in general is its unwillingness or inability to develop first-order or object-level theories of either India or the West. This has the consequence of making orientalism a strange and bizarre discourse fabricated or constructed by the West just for a special purpose, unrelated in any significant way to the cultural experience of the West itself. Therefore, when post-colonial theorists—whose work is very much part of the post-orientalist scholarship—actually try to (re-)describe India or the West, they end up simply recycling

Western descriptions: orientalist discourse when they talk about, say, Indian religion or “the caste-system”; post-structuralism or its offshoots when they talk about, say, the Enlightenment or ethics or multiculturalism. It is as though no new problems are generated which call for theoretical and empirical investigation. This should be deeply puzzling and disturbing. Consider the following argument: there are many cultures. But only one culture has offered descriptions of other cultures. Implicit in these descriptions is also an account of which phenomena are cultural and what it is to offer a description of cultures. Orientalism is a description of other cultures that reflects the West’s experience of them. The features of orientalism that Said finds noteworthy are to be explained, then, by looking at the structure of that experience. What must be the elements structuring that experience such that its self-description and other descriptions have those features? Now, unless other cultures are indeed as they appeared to the West and went about the world in the same way as the West, their description of themselves and the West and their account of what it is to understand cultures, when such descriptions and such accounts begin to emerge, are likely to bring forth different forms of knowledges. That is to say, we will then have not only alternative descriptions of cultures but alternative ways of giving descriptions of cultures (Rao, 1996). In short, if we take the phenomenon of orientalism seriously, that is, as a report of one culture’s experience of the world, whose status as knowledge will have to remain uncertain, but whose status as expressing features that structure that culture’s experience is not, then we have on our hands a simple, compelling and, yet, an absolutely novel argument for reconceptualizing the human sciences as we have known them. For what are these sciences indeed but one culture’s descriptions and theorizations of how it experienced the world! Lest this argument be assimilated by a careless reader to the standard relativist theses, note that the claim is not that forms of knowledge produced by a culture are valid for that culture alone or that they are unavailable to and un-understandable by other cultures. On the contrary, the ambition is to argue that we will not understand much about either cultures or the kinds of knowledges that they are able to produce unless we begin to produce a meta-theory of Western theories. In other words, the reconceptualization of the human sciences involves reflecting on and accounting for the particular relationship between theory and experience that constitutes Western culture as a form of life, as a way of going about in the world. Thanks to Balagangadhara’s work (Balagangadhara, 1994), we are in a position to see what can be accomplished if we interrogate orientalist description in order to understand the West.<sup>2</sup>

### **“... that stroke of genius called Christianity”**

This bold, challenging, and brilliantly original work (Balagangadhara, 1994) begins with an innocuous misdescription: it presents itself as a guided tour of Asia and Europe. As the reader, however, soon finds out, he or she is brought

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to a trial. And not as an observer either, for barely has the reader had the time to figure out what the trial is all about, he or she is subpoenaed and placed in the witness box. Will the Bible be produced and the oath to tell the truth and nothing but the truth administered? No! Because the Bible and the Truth are exhibits, they are evidences in this trial. How can that be? What is the trial all about, then? Who or what is on trial? Why does the reader—whether he or she is a Dinka, a Muslim, a pagan or a secular citizen, etc.—find himself interrogated? The trial, it turns out, is, indeed, about a misdescription, but there is nothing innocuous about either the trial or the misdescription.

It is time to drop the metaphor and get on with the actual trial:

At the beginning of the chapter on the Roman *religio*, I reflected upon the fact that we all share a Christian world. “Our (intellectual) world happens to be a Christian world,” I wrote there, “whether a Jew, a Dinka or a Brahmin; whether a theist, an atheist or a Muslim, our questions have a common origin.” It must be obvious what I had in mind then, and how true it is. In the name of science and ethnology, the Biblical themes have become our regular stock-in-trade: that God gave religion to humankind has become a cultural universal in the guise that all cultures have a religion; the theme that God gave one religion to humanity has taken the form and belief that all religions have something in common; that God implanted a sense of divinity is now a secular truth in the form of an anthropological, specifically human ability to have a religious experience.... One has become a Christian precisely to the degree Christianity ceases being specifically Christian in the process of its secularization. We may not have had our baptisms or recognize Jesus as the saviour; but this is how we prosecute the Christians. The retribution for this is also in proportion: the pagans themselves do not know how pagan they really are. We have, it is true, no need for specifically Christian doctrines. But then, that is because all our dogmas are in fact Christian.

(Balagangadhara, 1994: 246–7)

This, one would have thought, is deeply tragic. Balagangadhara, however, goes on to say: “We might as well stop here, but we cannot. The tragedy, or is it the Divine retribution, goes deeper. Far, far deeper” (p. 247). I am puzzled by this remark and the author, unfortunately, never returns to it. Perhaps the very project of this book to outline a (Christian) theory of (pagan) practices is an expression of how deep the tragedy goes: for that project appears both necessary and problematical.

Balagangadhara begins by putting on trial the belief that all cultures have religion. This belief is so common or universal as to be an unstated and taken-for-granted assumption. Balagangadhara begins by collecting together various Western discourses on Indian/Asian “religion.” The question for him is: why

did/does the West regard religion as a cultural universal when this is manifestly not an empirical truth? His investigation of the so-called theories of religion with which anthropologists, sociologists, theologians try to find religion in the non-Western world shows the startling fact that these theories are anything but theories. Although these scholars proceed from the assumption that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are religions, they have no explanation as to *what* makes them religion. In order to explain this state of affairs, Balagangadhara provides a “conceptual story” of the West as a culture: the emergence of Christianity in the pagan milieu, the transformation of Roman *religio* into religion, the double dynamic of religion which begins to structure the experience of a culture by producing a particular mode of going about the world. It has persisted in the face of overwhelming evidence against it. The question therefore is: whence the belief and why does it persist, albeit in different disguises? It is the belief of a culture whose identity is constituted in important ways by religion. However, the theory—indeed, the *ur-theory*—of which this belief was part has faded into the background, making the belief—as well as many other problematics generated by that theory—the more or less unintelligible common-sense of this culture. What makes this belief even more opaque (perhaps we should say transparent) is that this culture now regards itself as embodying a secular world-view; when this culture now turns to other cultures, it seeks to understand the latter too as embodying world-views. The secular people do not realize they are in essence doing and saying the same thing as the Christians: namely, understanding the other as a variation of themselves. How, then, does one explain the compulsion of this culture to understand the other only by transforming the other? By explaining the nature of Christianity *as a religion*. To be a religion is to have an explanatorily intelligible (EI) account of the Cosmos itself. To understand what this means is to understand why (in Nietzsche’s phrase) Christianity was a stroke of genius.

Religion brings together the cause of the world and the will of the Creator: it not only explains the Cosmos but also makes it and whatever happens in it intelligible to us. As Balagangadhara puts it:

This, then, is what makes an explanation into a ‘religious’ explanation: it is knowledge of the Cosmos which includes itself as an explanandum. There would have been a logical problem here, the threat of circularity perhaps, if this were to be a result of our (human) understanding or theory of the world. But this problem does not arise, because God has revealed His purpose by speaking to us about them. ‘Revelation,’ then, is the crucial component that breaks the possible circularity. As religious figures would put it perhaps, religion need not prove the existence of God at all; the existence of religion is the proof for the existence of God. In this sense, as an explanatorily intelligible account, religion is God’s gift to mankind and not a human invention.

(p. 333)

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This characterization of religion allows us to grasp the double dynamic of religion. As an EI account, religion has to claim universality, that is to say, it cannot be restricted by time, space, or other cultures or traditions. It must universalize itself; it does so by proselytization and secularization. But it is also the dilemma—the Christological dilemma: Christianity as a religion must retain its identity as a religion; however, in order to universalize itself, it is compelled to give up its identity; it is compelled to secularize itself. Since it claims to be the truth, it cannot restrict access to itself; but in order to retain its exclusivity, it must hold on to its identity as a particular religion. As a religion, Christianity cannot tolerate the otherness of the other; when confronted with other “pagan” traditions and practices (whether in late Antiquity or only a few hundred years ago in the Indian subcontinent), it must first transform the other into a religion, albeit a false one. It cannot acknowledge that there can be an *other* of religion and not *another* religion. Christianity as a religion then brings a peculiar reflexivity into the world; it begins to predicate truth and falsity of practices.<sup>3</sup> This is of course a category mistake, at least in the eyes of pagans, the practice-oriented peoples. The Christians, in contrast, are the people guided by a theory (albeit *the ur-theory* is present now only as a background after having undergone many modifications and transformation in the process of secularization); it is belief that is important to them. They interrogate practices and traditions as embodying beliefs, albeit false ones. This “fundamental” category mistake, however, lies at the origin of human history which Christianity begins to (re)write. Literally! The radically different pasts of different peoples get appropriated as *praeparatio evangelica!* “The twin movements of Christianizing the pagan world and the de-Christianizing of Christian beliefs appear to help us understand what is ‘really’ going on: the secular world is itself under the grip of a religious framework” (p. 221). What is really going on is that the distinction between the religious and the secular (between the sacred and the profane) is drawn within a theological framework, which has now become “universal.”

This is a brutally short summary of Balagangadhara’s main arguments; it nevertheless helps us to highlight the force and novelty of his account. At one level, we can see Balagangadhara’s powerful “conceptual story” correcting and deepening already existing descriptions and theories of Western culture. Everybody knows that Christianity played a central role in the evolution of this culture; everybody knows that modernity as a specifically Western phenomenon introduced radical changes in the world. But in what way does Christianity constitute the identity of the West? How are the secular/liberal self-descriptions of the West related to Christianity? Where did the specifically modern phenomenon of reflexivity emerge from? The standard accounts would mobilize, variously and in various combinations, science, industrial capitalism, enlightenment, revolution, and democracy as answer. To be sure, Balagangadhara’s account leaves out many things, but we must remember that it is offered as a partial description of a culture against the background of another culture, the culture of the author.

### The Original Category Mistake

Looked at from the point of view of *Heathen* and the culture of its author, the otherness of Western culture consists precisely in its compulsion to transform the culture it studies into a variation of itself. So, Balagangadhara is able to explain not only why Western theories look for religion in other cultures but also why their attempt to explain culture as embodying a “world-view” is essentially the secularization of a religious framework. In doing so, he is able to show the limits of an approach that looks at culture as a *phenomenon* to be explained, rather than as a *knowledge/practice* to be learned, and his own account exhibits a different way of theorizing cultural difference (Rao, 1996). That description is then embedded in a projected theory of cultural difference. The questions that Balagangadhara tries to formulate here are as difficult as they come, and my own discussion of them takes the form of an exploration of the philosophical difficulties we necessarily encounter on this terrain.

The conceptual story of the West then becomes a prelude to a hypothesis regarding cultural difference. Cultures, Balagangadhara proposes, are configurations of learning; the specificity of a particular cultural way of going about the world depends on what kind of learning activity—the ability to learn in a particular way which is also a meta-learning, learning to learn in a particular way—is dominant in that culture. Religion brings about a way of going about in the world which consists in knowing about the world; and this way of going about in the world brings forth theoretical knowledge (the natural sciences being the best examples of this knowledge). The double dynamic of religion extends “knowing about” to all domains of life, to all other goings-about in the world. When this way of going about in the world confronts other cultures, it can only understand the other tradition or practice as embodiment of beliefs; since what is knowable is beliefs, and only beliefs can be stated propositionally, knowledge of other cultures can only be textual, and so forth.

What, then, about the culture that the West in this way translated/interpreted but did not or could not understand? Balagangadhara’s hypothesis is that the configuration of learning that obtains in India/Asia is dominated by performative knowledge or practical knowledge (in an early essay, Balagangadhara has also used the attractive term action-knowledge).<sup>4</sup> Action-knowledge is not knowledge about actions, but the ability to act in order to know.<sup>5</sup> To know what? Not what there is in the world, but what is the right action to perform. What structures this way of going about in the world? Actions, obviously; hence here tradition and custom are kinds of actions. This looks counter-intuitive, even bizarre, if one looks at it from another configuration of learning (as did the orientalists). These are, of course, hypotheses, rather abstractly stated. The task is to give them richer structures through further investigations and examples. But some questions nevertheless force themselves, perhaps prematurely: how exactly are we to understand the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate mode in any configuration of learning? One can well imagine a culture surviving and even

flourishing without any significant theoretical knowledge; one cannot however think of any culture sustaining itself without action-knowledge or practical knowledge. For example, in the “knowing about” mode of going about in the world, how does action-knowledge find expression? Are there any forms of reflection that, as it were, accompany action-knowledge? I am thinking here of the *Vaçana* tradition in Karnataka, India, which, while not being theoretical, can be read as a form of practical or, in the broadest sense, ethical reflection. This tradition introduces a fascinating distinction between *anubhava*, which means experience, and *anubhaava*, which can be translated rather roughly as reflectively living an experience. How would one read such a tradition of reflection? What happens when the culture in which action-knowledge is dominant begins to learn or assimilate theoretical knowledge? How exactly can that change be formulated or registered? Will a new form of learning emerge in such a situation? What form will it take if it becomes dominant and what form if it remains subordinate? In one culture, Balagangadhara suggests, religion gives rise to theoretical knowledge; in another, ritual generates practical or performative knowledge. The natural sciences are, of course, the paradigmatic example of theoretical knowledge; it is the ability to know what there is in the world. In contrast, performative or practical knowledge is about what actions to perform:

performative knowledge (whose exemplification is in ritual) is the kind of knowledge that is required in building societies and sustaining social interactions. This is the ‘how to live’ ability I spoke of earlier, and to speak of ‘traditions’ is to speak not only of accumulated performative knowledge but also about the ways and mechanism of transmission.

Thus, actions need not be guided or founded “except by tradition and custom, which are themselves kinds of actions” (Balagangadhara, 1994: 487–88). This insight, grasped properly, has deep implication not only for understanding Indian culture but also for theorizing cultural difference itself. This will require some conceptual labor to articulate properly.

Let me begin by noting that Balagangadhara’s attempt to capture the cultural difference of the Christian West has nothing pagan about it. What do I mean by this? Several things, actually. From what we know of pagan cultures, the other was not a problem for them. As long as the other could be recognized as a people with practices of its own, its truths, its gods, its mythologies, pagan cultures had no trouble accepting the other, even though they might very well entertain doubts, skepticism, even outright criticism of those truths and those mythologies.<sup>2</sup> But when confronted with the radical otherness of a culture that defined itself in terms of beliefs, their culture did not have the resource to understand or respond to the claims of this culture, except again by *looking at the practice of this culture*, a culture which defines itself by its representations. There is of course an obvious sense in which pagan cultures not only have no use for a theory of cultural difference, they

would not even understand what that means, for they are open to any *practice* that is learnable. However, they also could not understand how their world, their practices and traditions, got (mis-) represented as *false*. The fate that befell the pagans of Rome or that the contemporary pagans still suffer could not be understood without a theory of religion constructed by Balagangadhara, against the background of his own culture; the exercise is at the same time a demonstration of what it is to learn from a culture that developed theoretical knowledge. The relationship between the culture of describer and the description, the West and Orientalism, the examination of which helped Balagangadhara to build his partial theory of the West, that relationship obtains in the other direction too, namely India and Indian description of the West; except that unlike the Westerners reporting their experience as the truth, here Balagangadhara's account incorporates the corresponding level as part of the theory. His theory both builds on "orientalism" and explains why Western experience of India produced what he calls "hipkapis," his name for the entities such as "Hinduism," and "the caste-system" (Balagangadhara, 2012a: 52–5), the nonsense word indicating the arbitrary nature of the experiential entities that were assumed to exist. And yet, a question remains to be explored in this complex dialectic of representations that are grounded in or presuppose the account they are offering, self-consciously or otherwise.

Balagangadhara offers a theoretical account of a culture whose compulsion it is to represent everything, including itself. How does one get at the practice which supports or sustains this representational activity; how does this representational culture represent its own practices?<sup>6</sup> It seems to me that a pagan would have attempted to focus on these two questions. Balagangadhara's account, however, grants Christianity its self-representation, in a way it replicates its structure. Therefore, when Balagangadhara suggests that cultural differences be plotted along culture-specific goings-about in the world and argues that religion brings about the predominance of theoretical knowledge (knowing about as their going about in the world), he seems to be accepting the Christian self-representation as true. He seems to be conceding that there can indeed be such a mode of going about in the world. What I wish to argue is that this mode of going about in the world cannot be all that it claims or seems, that it misrepresents; it has to misrepresent the practices on which it rests. I shall do so by summoning some European pagan thinkers who were concerned about practice and practical knowledge getting distorted or suppressed outright. That is to say, I shall be looking at the cultural self-descriptions of some Europeans who could not accept either Christianity or its secularized fusion of morality and rationality or its claim to provide a theoretical foundation for practices. They tried to come to terms with the philosophical representation or reformulation of theological concerns by providing a cultural self-description at a level where it could be shown that Christianity and its self-representations are in a profound sense a *mistake*. By contrasting these self-descriptions with Balagangadhara's partial description

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of the same culture as well as with his attempt to conceptualize cultural differences, I hope to be able to show not only that these self-descriptions and other descriptions can generate a fruitful dialogue but, more importantly, that there is something unsatisfactory about Balagangadhara's proposal for a comparative science of cultures, especially its symmetric picture of the relationship between knowledges.

At this stage, I am not sure if these are even well-formulated questions; but since they cannot be evaded, I will at least try to say something about the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate modes in the West through a discussion of Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, since the interpretive problems generated by their work will throw light on the difficulties one encounters in understanding practice and practical knowledge.

### **“In the beginning was the deed”: Reversing the Category Mistake?**

To take up Wittgenstein first, the difficulties will come into focus if we read Wittgenstein's later work as cultural self-descriptions *against* the background of the problematic that Balagangadhara has so boldly proposed through his partial description of the West. I want to argue that Wittgenstein and Nietzsche were attempting to reverse, as it were, the category mistake committed by Christianity, a mistake which, as Balagangadhara has insightfully shown, bestows a certain reflexivity on practices that cannot be reflexive in that way. The suggestion is that we can make better sense of Wittgenstein's concerns if we see him as attempting, within the framework of one configuration of learning, to evolve a form of reflection that tries to draw the limits to knowing about as a mode of learning.

What is involved in going on in a certain way? What is involved in continuing a series, in continuing a cultural practice? I would like to suggest that the Wittgensteinian paradox—or, more accurately, the Kripkensteinian paradox<sup>7</sup>—can be read in an entirely new way if we read Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following as grappling with the question of cultural practices. What exactly is the paradox? Suppose a friend asks me to add 65 and 55 and I present him with the result:  $65 + 55 = 120$ . He looks at me with a puzzled expression and says: “Surely, it's 6.” I am bewildered and point out that if one uses the “plus” function as I was taught to use it, then what you get is 120. To which he says, Well, that may be so, but I thought you always meant quaddition by addition where quaddition is just like addition except that when one of the quadded numbers is equal or greater than 55, then their quum is 6. And so forth. (One could use different examples, for example the one that Wittgenstein himself uses: continuing a series. I tell someone to go on with the series, 100,102,104...and when he reaches 200, he starts writing 204, 208,... When I tell him that is not what I meant, he is baffled because he thinks he is indeed going on the way I meant him to.) The addition examples merely make the problem vivid. The argument holds for the use of words as

well. The paradox arises because there is no fact of the matter as to what I meant/mean by “plus.” No rule or formula can be invoked to justify my meaning addition rather than quaddition, since it can be countered by reformulating the rule to make the action conform to the reformulated rule. What is in question is precisely what one means by being in “accord with the rule” or “the correct step according to the formula.” Here is how Wittgenstein himself puts the matter:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.... What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases.

(Wittgenstein, 1958: #201; unless otherwise specified all emphases in passages quoted from Wittgenstein are original)

To get at the larger significance of what Wittgenstein is saying here, it is important to set aside the example of counting. For what is involved here is how we understand custom, practice, and action.

‘How am I able to obey a rule?’—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’

(Wittgenstein, 1958: #217)

But the proper question is not really “How am I able to obey a rule?”, but “How am I able to understand an action?” or, better still, “How am I able to perform a new action?” For rules do not explain the action. The point emerges clearly elsewhere:

He must go on like this *without a reason*. Not, however, because he cannot yet grasp the reason but because in *this* system there is no reason (‘The chain reason comes to an end’).

And the *like this* (i.e., ‘go on like this’) is signified by a number, value. For at *this* level the expression of the rule is explained by the value, not the value by the rule.

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For just when one says ‘But don’t you see ...?’ the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining.

‘He grasps the rule intuitively.’—But why the rule? Why not how to continue?

(Wittgenstein, 1967: #301–3)

Why not, indeed? Why not action itself? Consider now what Wittgenstein says in the very first extract above: “What this shows is that there is a way of grasping the rule which is not an *interpretation*.” Surely, it would be more accurate to formulate this as: “What this shows is that there is a way of grasping the action which is *not an interpretation*? ” And this holds for the actor/performer as well as the observer/interpreter. What if, one might object, the two are not from the same culture, that is, do not participate in the same form of life? Surely, the outsider, the anthropologist, can only ask, in the best *Verstehen* tradition, the agent for the rules or principles underlying his action? That is to say, she can only ask for the justification for the way he continued or acted; when the agent exhausts the justification and hits bedrock, the anthropologist’s spade is turned too and she is inclined to say: “That is simply what they do.”

The bedrock metaphor, however, is misleading to the extent that it blocks us from asking what Wittgenstein himself asks elsewhere: what could this bedrock be except action?

Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true. i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of a language-game.

(Wittgenstein, 1972: #204)

Action continues a practice, tradition, or custom, which, as Balagangadha teaches us, are themselves kinds of action. Can we then say that actions (-knowledges) are what constitute the “bedrock” of a culture? We are now in a position both to reinterpret Wittgenstein and to propose a reconceptualization of the human sciences.

My discussion of rule-following has not, of course, resolved the paradox, but it has unraveled a potentially rich field of inquiry that, in my view, necessitates the reconceptualization of the human sciences. The paradox reveals the limits of theoretical knowledge; or, rather, the paradox arises when theoretical knowledge tries to interpret action-knowledge as a variant of itself. This too is a bit misleading if it suggests that theoretical knowledge acknowledges the existence of a distinct species of knowledge. A more rigorous way of putting the matter would be to say that Wittgenstein begins to indicate, or show, the possibility of there being a distinct kind of knowledge, which we

are calling variously “action-knowledge” or “practical knowledge” or “performative knowledge,” by plotting the limits of theoretical knowledge. This was the aim of Wittgenstein’s attempt to dissolve philosophical problems. But his mistake—a “deep” mistake—was to think that philosophical problems arise because of the bewitchment of the intellect by language, and consequently, his misunderstanding of his own activity as clearing away the bewitchment by throwing light on the uses of words. There is something deeply unconvincing in the view that the problems that a culture has grappled with are the expressions of linguistic confusion. Perhaps there is a different way of interpreting Wittgenstein’s attempt to dissolve philosophical problems.

If one doesn’t want to SOLVE philosophical problems—why doesn’t one give up dealing with them. For solving them means changing one’s point of view, the old way of thinking. And if you don’t want that, you should consider the problems unsolvable.

(Wittgenstein, 1992: #84)

The bewitchment of intellect by language, then, may just be a symptom of philosophy’s inability to grasp the centrality of practice to human going about in general, not merely to this or that culture. It seems to me that the extraordinarily fascinating later fragments of Wittgenstein are better read as an attempt to develop a form of deliberation that hesitantly articulates a different relationship to practice and experience and keeps hold of that relationship long enough to show the distinctiveness of that relationship, its un-assimilability to theoretical/philosophical knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

Consider the following remarks, all taken from *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1972):

Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and *the practice has to speak for itself*  
(§ 139; emphasis added)

Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; -but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of language-game.

(§ 204)

And here the strange thing is that when I am quite certain of how the words are used, I have no doubt about it, I can still give no *grounds* for my way of going on. If I tried I could give a thousand, but none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for.

(§ 307)

## 16 *Meta-Theory, Practical Knowledge, and Normativity*

At any rate it is important to imagine a language in which *our* concept ‘knowledge’ does not exist.

(§ 562)

And finally, at the end of a characteristically self-questioning remark, this seemingly enigmatic self-admonition:

... and write with confidence  
‘In the beginning was the deed.’

(§ 401)

I suggested that we read these remarks as cultural self-descriptions. Does that mean that the “we” in later Wittgenstein is relative to a culture? Are these remarks empirical propositions about a culture? The answer to the latter is clear: they cannot be empirical propositions. Rather, they are aimed at showing that a certain kind of theoretical demand for explanations and justifications of practices cannot be met because practices are ... what they are. To insist on knowing or explaining what they are, how we go on, is to look for an empirical explanation where there is none to be had. His remarks, then, are situated at that point where we have run out of empirical explanations of how we go on; and the insight they provide, if any, enables us to cope with the “empirical exhaustion” (Lear, 1982: 388).

To take up the first question now, several commentators have noticed that there is a certain vagueness or indeterminacy in Wittgenstein’s “we.” When he notes the “groundlessness” of our beliefs or imagines examples of radically different linguistic practices, he is trying to show what it is to be “minded as we are,” to share with others “routes of interest, perceptions of salience, feelings of naturalness, etc.” (Lear, 1982: 386). This exercise is, clearly, not an empirical one; it does not, unlike the relativistic one, claim to provide *explanations* for being “minded” as we are. The imagined alternatives have the sole purpose of rendering perspicuous the boundaries of our form of life, its “unpredictability,” its “groundlessness.” The exercise does not warrant the conclusion that we must revise practices—the law of the excluded middle, for example—that have no justification. The “we” then is a transcendental “we” relativized to humanity rather than to an empirical “we” of a culture. It has been further suggested that in this precarious exploration of the boundaries or limits of our practices, a space could be found where relativism can legitimately take bite, and that is the space occupied by our ethical practices. But the exploration of the alternatives opened up by this space would be imagining alternatives *for* us (and not *to* us, as Williams wittily puts it).

How does this interpretation of Wittgenstein square with my suggestion that he should be seen as offering a cultural self-description and that the point of that exercise was to reverse the category mistake committed by a religious culture? I would like to claim that Wittgenstein (1972) was simply

(!) trying to say that the existence of certain practices—mathematical, scientific, ethical, or whatever—is itself the only justification for going on the way we do in any of these practices; if someone did not get the hang of them, no further justification—by showing, for example, that these practices are true, are the embodiment of reason itself—can make them acceptable or understandable. And the one who could not or would not accept or understand these practices need not be “irrational” or inhabit another relativistic universe. Is this not relativism? But relativism is a worry if we want to make truth do more than it can, if, that is, we have a religious notion of truth.

Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? Am I to say I have no good ground for doing so? Isn’t precisely this what we call a ‘good ground.’

(§ 608)

Supposing we met people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Now, how do we imagine this? Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (And for this reason we call them primitive.) Is it wrong for them to consult an oracle and be guided by it?—If we call this ‘wrong’ aren’t we using our language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs?

(§ 609)

And are we right or wrong to combat it? Of course there are all sorts of slogans which will be used to support our proceedings.

(§ 610)

I said I would ‘combat’ the other man,—but wouldn’t I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how far do we go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think of what happens when missionaries convert natives.)

(§ 612)

It would be a mistake to focus on the problem of relativism when we try to understand what Wittgenstein is getting at (is the philosophical obsession with combating relativism of a piece with Christian or religious obsession with combating false gods and heathen practices?). No practice embodies reason or truth in such a way that the very proposition embedded in that practice should simply strike me as true. Nothing in the practice of consulting the physicist can make the practice of a person who consults an oracle false; to make it false, one has to use the physicist’s language-game as a base from which to combat, persuade, discipline the person consulting an oracle. For Wittgenstein, as I interpret him, this is not a problem about the truth of relativism; indeed, relativism is a problem for a culture which seeks to combat the other with slogans, persuasion, etc. but cannot admit that it does so. It cannot admit it in part because it cannot understand itself or misunderstands

itself.<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein's self-description is aimed at showing that this theoretical culture profoundly misdescribes its own practice. If it understood the nature of practice, then it would not see the other as a problem. The missionary-native analogy Wittgenstein uses is perfect, and we now know from Balagangadhara why it is more than an analogy. Wittgenstein, as we all know, thought that philosophy was the cause of this misdescription, implying, rather tamely, that once we stop doing philosophy, the problem of saying or showing what practice is would also disappear.

These considerations connect up with Balagangadhara's concern, by both complementing it and correcting it, in two ways. First, Balagangadhara's partial description of the West showed why that culture was compelled to understand the other only by transforming it. Wittgenstein, I claimed, shows how it misunderstands or misdescribes itself. Balagangadhara's description helps us to deepen our understanding of the sense in which that mistake or misdescription was no ordinary mistake but a "world-historic" one. It also helps us to understand how philosophical problems or more modestly, some philosophical problems themselves are symptoms of a larger cultural process or compulsion. Some of the problems a secular culture grapples with—epistemological ones about the foundation of practices and beliefs; moral ones about equality, freedom, justice, rights, duty, and responsibility, for example—are intelligible as problems only when we fill in the theological framework that gave rise to those problems. Some of these problems, therefore, do require therapeutic dissolution for reasons other than, and deeper than, Wittgenstein himself gave. Second, Balagangadhara's attempt to elaborate a theory of cultural differences unfolds at the same level or in the same territory as Wittgenstein's attempt to reverse the category mistake of a culture which privileges theoretical understanding or knowledge. We can now situate the force of Wittgenstein's enigmatic (self-)admonition and the aphorism that follows: "... and write with confidence: 'In the beginning was the deed.'"<sup>5</sup> There's a Nietzschean ring to the aphorism! Indeed, it provides us with a logical transition to another pagan thinker of Europe, in whose writing it would have played a more obvious role as a correction of the "world-historic" mistake he thought Christianity was.

### Falsity of the World

I want now to discuss Nietzsche who was concerned to understand a phenomenon that was violently disengaging from customs and practices while distorting and devaluing them, namely Christian morality. His critical self-description targeted precisely the dynamic of Christianity (in which he included philosophy too) with the hope of overcoming the "lie entailed in the belief in God." Rereading Nietzsche's genealogy of Christianity in the light of Balagangadhara's theory of religion, I am struck by the extent to which the former complements the latter. Nietzsche set up Christian morality as the target of genealogy; he identified morality as a genuinely new phenomenon,

except that he found it to be the most invidious, corrosive, “*resentiment*” generating force that was destroying anything that was life-giving or life-enhancing. A kind of will to know, which gave rise to the theoretical attitude we have been discussing, that was indeed proving destructive of experience itself. The peculiar will to know is what underlies the impulse of morality to falsify practices and customs, what in the eyes of pagans appears as a category mistake; fusing morality and rationality, it begins to substitute itself for the practical knowledge that practices and customs sustain.

Since I do not have the space here to reconstruct Nietzsche’s arguments, let me quickly and schematically list some of the themes and questions that resonate with Balagangadhara’s concerns: the contrast between the pagan culture of Antiquity and the Christian West; the priority, if you like, of custom or practice; Nietzsche’s account of Christianity as a “closed system of will, goal, and interpretation” (Nietzsche, 1994: 116; hereafter referred to as GM); the will to truth or the will to know that enables Christianity to fuse epistemology and morality (which can be shown to be an implication of the EI account Balagangadhara offers); the link between the ascetic ideal of Christianity and both atheism and science; the invention of the will, which leads to obscure, but still powerful, notions of human action and to a moralized psychology that supports it. Finally, the perspectival character of “our” human knowledge.

Like Wittgenstein, Nietzsche is at pains to show the logical priority of custom and practice; Nietzsche, however, does not simply stop where Wittgenstein’s account does. He cannot; indeed, he is forced to do more. That is why I termed his description *critical* self-description. Rather than stop at a theoretical characterization of Christianity, he focuses on how the latter’s will to truth distorts or misdescribes practices and how these misdescriptions in the service of what he calls the ascetic ideals create entities or experiences such as will, conscience, responsibility, and guilt:

But have you ever asked yourself properly how costly the setting up of *every* ideal on earth has been? How much reality always had to be vilified and misunderstood in the process, how many lies had to be sanctified ...

(GM: 70)

Confronted with the “power” and “monstrosity” of the ideals, he seeks points of resistance to them. When he refers to the cost involved in the setting up of the ascetic ideal, he does not mean the violent history of Christianity. His genealogy of morality is not a history of Christianity. It tries to grasp the practices that Christianity as will to truth brings into being and perpetuates in order to sustain itself and that will. Sometimes, it fastens upon local or particular examples to show the distortions and misunderstandings of practices; at other times, it goes further and tries to grasp the practices that Christianity brings into being without acknowledging it. Sometimes, the

exercise is conceptual, as when Nietzsche shows how morality “misconstrues all action as conditional upon an agency, a ‘subject’ and ends up doubling the ‘deed’” (GM: 28). At other times, it is historical, as when Nietzsche contrasts Greek gods with the Christian God to bring out the peculiar economy of spiritual debt, in which God sacrifices or crucifies himself for man’s guilt, invented by Christianity (its “stroke of genius.”) Fundamentally, however, genealogy seeks to call into question “the will to truth”:

Because the ascetic ideal has so far been *master* over all philosophy, because truth was set as being, as God, as the highest authority itself, because truth was not *allowed* to be a problem. Do you understand this ‘allowed to be’? From the very moment that faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, *there is a new problem as well*: that of the *value* of truth. The will to truth needs a critique let us define our own task with this, the value of truth is tentatively to be *called into question....*

(GM, 120, emphasis original)

The question is: how does one do this? By formulating another goal in place of the goals set up by the ascetic ideal? Or by pointing out the mistake involved in the setting up of goals? But what exactly is the mistake involved? How does one say that? We are, it would seem, back on the Wittgensteinian territory. How to indicate the nature of practices and their lack of goals, without giving in to the temptation of setting up alternative goals?

What does the *power* of that ideal mean, the *monstrosity* of its power? Why has it been given so much space? Why has more effective resistance not been offered to it? The ascetic ideal expresses one will: *where* is the opposing will, in which an *opposing ideal* might express itself? The ascetic ideal has a *goal*, *-which* is so general, that all the interests of human existence appear petty and narrow when measured against it; it inexorably interprets epochs, peoples, man, all with reference to this one goal, it permits of no other interpretation, no other goal, and rejects, denies, affirms, confirms only with reference to *its* interpretation (-and was there ever a system of interpretation more fully thought through?); ... it believes there is nothing on earth of any power which does not first have to receive a meaning, a right to existence, a value from it, as a tool to *its* work, as a way and means to *its* goal, to *one* goal ... Where is the *counterpart* to this closed system of will, goal, and interpretation? Why is the counterpart *lacking*? ... Where is the *other* ‘one goal’?

(GM, 115-16, emphasis original)

The rhetorical question about the counterpart and another goal is precisely that: rhetorical. Nietzsche considers whether secularism and atheism express a different ideal or goal and argues that they derive their values from the

ascetic ideal. Indeed, he sees atheism or secularism as expressing the “kernel” of the ascetic ideal, the will to truth shorn of all other trappings. As for science, which has or can have no value of its own, he wonders if its value too will depreciate with the depreciation of the value of the ascetic ideals. Christianity appropriated human histories through a category mistake; history as we know it and live it is the universalization of that mistake. The fundamental thrust of his genealogy of morality is directed at making us realize that the setting up of will, goal, and ideal as a closed system is a mistake and a misdescription of ... Saying that is precisely the difficulty that both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein negotiate in their different ways. Nietzsche, however, goes further than Wittgenstein in that he seeks to grasp the reality, the distorted and obscure reality, a “reality” constituted by a “history” of “errors” and “misdescriptions” and “redeemed” by morality with its own peculiar will to know and will to truth. Why does Christianity as religion produce this “distorted” reality?

The answer must begin with an understanding of how the process of norming is necessarily experience occluding. The theory of religion as an explanatorily intelligible account of the Cosmos explains how the expansion of Christianity as a religion has a double dynamic: on one vector, it expands by converting heathens to Christianity, and on another, it expands by secularizing itself, by shedding its overt doctrinal beliefs and values but still retaining its explanatorily intelligible structure. While the former has its own complexity (not relevant to us at the moment), it is at least physically limited, whereas the latter has virtually no limits since it proceeds by normativizing everything in every domain—emotions, social structures, sexuality, economy, and so forth. In its plain Biblical story of God and Devil, Christian morality presents an intelligible, if not a particularly attractive, account of how morality requires the free subordination of one’s will to the will of God, as revealed in the Book, its prophets, and the Church. This sets the doctrinal stage for the process of *conversio*: in the monastery, the priest undergoes a battle with himself to overcome all sinful thoughts, emotions, and urges that pervade him, in order to imitate the life of Christ (who embodies God’s will), a process that seemingly requires an unending process of making over. Historically, the process involved moralizing or norming the ethical thought of the Greeks, imposing the moral structure on the flock, simultaneously “totalizing” and “individualizing” norms (Foucault, 2002a: 325). This process takes on another dimension altogether when Protestantism strives to bring all aspects of internal and external life under moral norms and generalizes this process by turning everyone into a priest. The secularization of this Protestant *conversio* gives us the familiar phenomenon called morality. In its explicit religious garb, it’s an attempt to see if one’s will is subordinate to the will of God. But since one is also endowed with free will, one has the choice to be moral or immoral; however, and this is the paradox of morality, one can only be immoral if one is moral, and he cannot be moral if he is immoral (Balagangadhara, 2002). Even

though this paradox propels morality, it also proves challenging to comprehend as the readily intelligible Biblical framework is shed in the process of secularization. The discourse on morality takes on an increasingly justificatory and meta-justificatory dimension. In secular moral theories, it presents itself as the search for the sources of normativity.<sup>10</sup>

It remains for us to deal with the problem of understanding the relationship between religion as the explanatorily intelligible account of the Cosmos and normativity. The latter cannot be deduced as a logical property of the former, for the simple reason that there are many religions (at least three). The transmission of explanatory intelligibility is, therefore, a contingent empirical matter and this strange phenomenon or institution called morality emerges to carry out that task. (I will speak of morality as a domain which can obviously have any number of religious and secular theories, each addressing the paradox in its own way and each giving its account of what is immoral.) In a way, its task is analogous to what the early natural philosophy under the aegis of theology tried to do to nature, namely decipher the will of God. But since this theory dealt with the practical sphere where special creatures made in the image of God acted, it had the additional task of enforcing the command of God on them, ensuring that their action submits to the will of God. The best or the most efficient way morality as theory tried to carry out its task was by using the Biblical “postulate” of the falsity of this world. The falsity involved here is not easy to understand since it is not straightforwardly epistemic or logical. We are actually tempted to say it is moral except that that is what we are trying to understand! The Biblical story of Satan’s Kingdom perhaps lends some intelligibility to this falseness idea. In any case, as Nietzsche pointed out, the falsity of the world meant disavowal of worldly things, of worldliness itself: “From the standpoint of morality, the world is false. But to the extent that morality itself is a part of the world, morality is false” (Nietzsche, 1968: 298). This paradox unleashes a movement that both disowns and reclaims (perhaps both successively and simultaneously) domains of practical life, such as ethics, erotics, art, family, the state, and the army (Nietzsche, 1968: 125). It may be that this “paradox” is a different but equivalent version of the one Balagangadhara formulates. Nietzsche’s formulation makes clear the vast colonizing scope of normativity. Every action in any domain can be seen as a violation of norms. Of course, morality is always dealing with violations and understandably too since there’s little point in enumerating actions that are in its eyes moral (and supererogatory acts are not a moral requirement); but at any point, any act could turn out to be immoral. It is therefore not surprising that all theories dealing with human practical affairs are normatively structured, be they political theory, economic theory, or social theory. Furthermore, we also see how an already normed domain can again be opened up for further norming. This is what happens when Protestantism deals with the secularized world of Catholicism, and we will have to see how the secularized world of

Protestantism, the post-Enlightenment world (“our” world too unfortunately), gets normed again.<sup>11</sup>

I have found extremely persuasive Balagangadhara’s account of the dynamic of religion and his use of that as a partial description of the Western culture. I have tried to raise doubts about his further ambition to embed that description in a theory of cultural differences which seeks to identify the dominant mode of going about of a culture. The argument I have sketched through an interpretation of Wittgenstein and Nietzsche tried to make two related points: Balagangadhara’s description of the West’s cultural compulsion and his attempt to explain it in terms of the predominance of one type of knowledge has, in effect, the consequence of accepting the self-description of the Christian and secularized Christian culture. To express the same point a little more dramatically: in Balagangadhara’s account, it looks as though the West is condemned to be Christian. To show why it is unacceptable—unacceptable to whom? to some Europeans, obviously; but also, as we shall see presently, to us, Indians or Asians—I contrasted Balagangadhara’s description of the West with the self-descriptions of some European pagans. My discussion of Wittgenstein’s self-description as an attempt to “reverse” the category mistake committed by Christianity as a religion was aimed at showing both how Balagangadhara’s project for a science of cultures with its ambition of capturing differences at a global level runs into philosophical difficulties and the sense in which we can say that the dominant cultural self-description of the Christian West is a mistake. I suggested further, through an all too brief interpretation of Nietzsche, that the project of “overcoming” that mistake should be part of our description of the West.

We have, or should have, an interest in that project because, remember, our intellectual world too is Christian—we no longer seem to know how pagan we really are. In the same way as these European pagan thinkers were and are struggling with the misdescriptions that they cannot simply cast aside because in one sense they themselves are the product of those misdescriptions and errors, we too have been living and struggling with a history of misdescriptions (a much shorter one, obviously), with a history created and perpetuated by misdescriptions. For them as well as us, the difficult question is how we can say we are the products of errors or misdescriptions without implying that there was and is an entity waiting to be correctly described. It cannot, therefore, be a question of reviving or restoring anything. As Williams puts it:

It is beguiling to dream about a history in which it was not true that Christianity, in Nietzsche’s words, ‘robbed us of the harvest of the culture of the ancient world.’ These dreams should not detain us, but the fact that such speculations are a waste of time does not mean that there could not have been such a world.

(1993: 12)

Nor can that counterfactual allow us, moreover, to “see,” as Williams (1993: 12) engagingly remarks, “Christianity as merely the longest and most painful route from paganism to paganism”. It is an important, if obvious, precaution for these Nietzscheans who use the Antique culture as a contrast as well as a support for their self-understanding and self-overcoming. Their objective is, to quote another Nietzschean, “to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently” (Foucault, 1985: 9).

How do things stand with us? The focus on European pagans may have been misleading to the extent that it is only through the structure of self-interpretation imposed by Christianity that all pagan cultures look the same. To say that self-interpretation is a mistake and we should set aside that structure does not in any way imply that cultures that looked the same or similar through that structure would look the same if they looked at one another independently. Would we then need a theory of cultural difference? We cannot really tell. We have some way to go before taking up that question, before, indeed, we can even formulate that question. Some questions, however, appear prematurely, as it were, compelling us to respond with whatever resources we have (which is not to say that we can actually decide the proper time and place for questions). It is not as though we can now separate the question of reversing the category mistake from the question of cultural difference.<sup>12</sup> My suggestion then is that we do not; indeed, we cannot. What does that imply? One immediate implication is for how we understand the process of secularization itself and whether that already requires us to reconceptualize the human sciences. If it is the business of the human sciences to give an account of human practices, customs, and traditions and explain the significance of cultural differences in terms of that account, it would not be difficult to see how Wittgenstein and Nietzsche’s attempt to show the limits of theoretical knowledge also has radical implication for the human sciences as they are practiced now. Orientalism expresses Western self-description in the same way as contemporary Western social sciences and the philosophical reflection on its methodology do. Both display the same problem regarding practical or action-knowledge: *the one does it when it confronts action-knowledge externally and the other does it when it tries to conceptualize action-knowledge internally*. If this is right, we have the resources to argue that secularization involves the norming or moralizing of different domains of practical life. I will henceforth use the term normativization to designate this process. To repeat: secularization is the normativization of practices or domains of action-knowledge. Let me test this formulation by looking at West’s norming of itself through the so-called human sciences and its norming of India through orientalism.

### **Ontologically Peculiar Entities; or, What Has Western Sexuality Got to Do with Indian Caste-System?**

Let me take up for investigation “the caste-system,” without doubt the most astounding creation of orientalism. As we saw earlier in our discussion of

Edward Said, orientalism is better understood as a set of constraints or limitations. Understanding those constraints or limitations is to understand something about the culture that structured the experience of the describers. Said's observations regarding orientalism enable us to offer an initial characterization of orientalist "knowledge": it is the result of the attempt to *normalize* experience. Whose attempt and whose experience? Obviously, the European experience of itself and of other cultures. And what does normalization involve? What happens when experience is brought under a norm?

Thanks to Michel Foucault's later work, especially the first and second volumes of *History of Sexuality*, we are in a position to offer a historically rich and theoretically compelling picture of what happens when particular domains of experience get normed. According to Foucault, "sexuality" is invented or constructed (by Christianity); it comes into being as an attempt to speak the "truth" about sex. Struck by both the immense proliferation of discourses on sexuality and its complete opacity, Foucault finds himself arguing that "sex" itself is the creation of sexuality. Even at this stage, Foucault had suspected that somehow truth and norm are involved in the proliferation and opacity of the discourse on sexuality. However, his obsession with power/knowledge had blocked him from pursuing his genealogical investigation further. The very fact that Foucault took another seven years to publish the second volume is some indication that he had realized he was not simply describing the emergence of one more discursively constructed object such as "madness" or "criminality." What accounts for its incredible proliferation, which however does not show any development of the kind one observes in discourses that become science, and its increasing opacity? How do people go about experiencing what cannot be experienced?

In his, *The Uses of Pleasure*, which should be considered the first significant work on the norming of experience, Foucault begins by noting that "sexuality"—the term or its equivalent, the thing and the discourse—did not exist in pre-Christian Europe, which is of course an uncontroversial claim for constructivists who would claim that it is indeed Foucault who taught us that there are no historical constants. Foucault then proceeds to show with great clarity how "sexuality" is what emerges when diverse and distinct areas of practices and reflections about them—dietetics (diet and regimen), economy (the household and the relationship between husband and wife), erotics (reflections on the relationship with boys), and finally truth or wisdom in relation to erotic pleasure—when these areas or domains are clubbed together or forcibly unified by norming or moralizing them. The transformation—as much historical as it is discursive—results in the peculiar entity called "sexuality." This thing does not exist elsewhere in India or China. It however seems to exist for the West; they "experience" it, talk about it. Its scope is ever expanding, though in a repetitious, monotonous way. It is the introduction of (a distinctive notion of) truth and norm by Christianity in the pagan milieu that drives this historical and cultural transformation that is still incomplete. The four practical domains of Greek culture that Foucault reconstructs had not known or needed truth or norms. But Christianity begins to

insinuate in a corrosive way that these practices do not meet a norm. Then comes the question: why do these practices do not meet the norm, what prevents them? What is the truth about them? The answer begins to take shape: sexuality. But what is “sexuality”—the proliferation begins, from theology to psychoanalysis to immense amount of discourses that Foucault calls *scientia sexualis*. What is transformed, driven underground, and rendered opaque is the whole practical domain of practices and the reflections that nourished them. This raises many theoretical and historical questions, in particular about the nature of Christianity as religion and its relationship to truth and norm and about the kind of inquiry that genealogy claims to be. I read Foucault as suggesting that genealogy is the appropriate mode of inquiry when we are trying to understand a normativized domain. Whether or not this has philosophical implication, I want to claim that it has implication for philosophy. Philosophical questions about truth and norm—and it is doubtful if there are any other issues that philosophy as the off-spring of theology is defined by—are important despite the fact that philosophically these questions cannot be solved; they are important because they afford us an historical understanding of a culture for which those questions appear as universal.

Before we tackle those questions, it should be already clear that Foucault’s story of the emergence of “sexuality” through the norming of four domains of practical life in ancient Greece provides not only a deeper way of understanding the relationship between orientalism and Western culture but also offers substantive and methodological clues to understanding how one very special and spectacular orientalist construct emerged, namely “the caste-system.” “Caste” stands in the same relationship to “the caste-system” as “sex” stands to “sexuality.” Particular practices, arts of living and reflections associated with them, dietary practice, etc. in one place get normativized to produce “sexuality”; in another place and time, similar and even more heterogeneous and complex practices, rituals, reflections, professions, etc. get bundled together through normativization into “the caste-system.” The task then is to provide a historically based conceptual story of how this bundling together comes about. Though it should be obvious, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that what the orientalists bundled together is their experience of what they saw, observed, felt, and dealt with. The mechanism in both cases was the same. Once “sexuality” comes into being, it gets deployed as an explanation, but what goes into “sexuality”—facts, properties, traits—remains undetermined and depends on particular circumstances and theories; within certain limits, anything, even absences and lacks, could become sexuality (as is perhaps obvious from contemporary deployment of sexuality). But the limits are there, despite the opaqueness of “sex” and proliferating layers of “sexuality,” in the form of an internal link to the place of erotics in practical life. Without that internal link, there would not be either the dynamism that drives “sexuality” or the vague feeling that it answers something or makes one experience something, however hard it has become to say what it is.

In the case of “the caste-system,” there were no such internal link; what external links there were depended on who was dealing with what in which context. Thus, the all-encompassing character of “the caste-system” and the highly inconsistent set of facts, principles, and properties that goes into its characterization. The missionary tries to make sense of the practices he saw as the false practices of a kind of religion called “Hinduism” and invoked “the caste-system” of the religion as an obstacle to converting the Hindus to Christianity; the Protestant missionary refines this picture by introducing the Brahmin as the powerful, cunning, and corrupt priest (like the Catholic priest) who holds the other Hindus in his ideological sway. So, a piece of theology becomes a fact and then a factoid when that theology fades into the background. The administrator or the trader who has to deal with different social groups finds readily recognizable “caste” properties of groups (you have to deal with x group in this way); and these properties also explain why there is no sense of individuality among Indians. You cannot trust them because they are unreliable, morally and epistemically. The orientalist scholar finds this social system existing from time immemorial and unearths ancient manuscripts which testify to its existence (*The Purusha Sukta*); with the memory of the Protestant struggle fresh in his mind, he finds “sect” and “religious” movements that have rebelled against “the caste-system” of Hinduism. The anthropologist finds instructions for rituals or reflections on them showing the religious nature of “the caste-system.” The traveler finds what people do (x ill-treats y) and, especially, what they don’t do (not eating together, not touching each other) of great moral significance. The evidence is plentiful, from the colonial archive to the post-colonial academic scholarship; the conceptual story, drawing on that evidence, then will show how the operation of norming works on different kinds of material to produce “the caste-system.”

With these two accounts on hand, we understand why European “sexuality” has everything to do with Indian “caste-system.” Both are entities brought into being by very much the same mechanism. “The caste-system” is as real to the West as its own “sexuality.” It is this aspect of normed entities that I wish to capture by characterizing them as ontologically peculiar entities. But my claim is that they are only real—in some peculiar ontological sense of the term—to them because a culture driven by norms can only experience domains of practical life by norming them. Norms displace practical experience by reformulating them in some fashion and yet people claim to “experience” them! Balagangadhara calls them hipkapis, as seen above. His claim is that they just are Western experiential entities and that is pretty much all there is to say about them. The question that everyone is immediately tempted to ask is: what about the circulation or deployment of “the caste-system” in India? There is of course a simple answer to it: namely, it is largely the use of a classificatory system for pragmatic purposes. I say largely because, the intellectuals’ use of it seems to be an expression of the cognitive enslavement to colonialism. The exploration of the question is nonetheless

important because it will enable us to show why the constructivist's account of "the caste-system" as the creation of the colonial institution such as the census is implausible and even absurd. Such a reading not only has to attribute truly miraculous powers to the colonial state, it also has to assume the intelligibility of the entities that have become real, which is baffling since questions about its intelligibility is what started the interrogation of orientalism in the first place. To say that the Indians have become what they were not is no help if you cannot say what they were and what they have become. The census and similar institutions (including colonial and post-colonial social science) directed at Indian social practices already presuppose the colonizer's experience of "the caste-system": they should be regarded as an archive of the sedimented actions of the colonizers rather than as descriptions of the world. Yet another question that could be raised is: granted what you say about the normativity of Western culture, might it not be the case that normativity has now spread to the non-normative cultures such as India as a result precisely of colonialism? Another kind of objection could arise from the other direction, as it were. Why not regard "sexuality" simply as a discourse, or as perhaps an essentially theoretical entity, that is, an entity whose spuriousness is revealed when we find that background theory that postulated it is dubious.<sup>13</sup>

These issues bring up again the question of how do we theorize norms. Raised explicitly as a philosophical problem, Western intellectual tradition has either asserted their existence dogmatically or simply taken them for granted. A very small minority of thinkers—which includes Nietzsche and Wittgenstein—has simply denied that there can be such a thing as a moral norm. The latter stance, correct though it is, does not help us in understanding a norm-driven culture. Nietzsche suspected as much, proposing genealogy as a historical way of studying how morality emerges and what effects it has. But his target "morality" was so elusive and general, and his writing so idiosyncratic, that his genealogy has been open to all sorts of misinterpretation, including Bernard Williams' recent interpretation of it as a fictional, "just so," story like the "social contract" story (Williams, 2002). My interpretation of Foucault's work is aimed at showing how he manages to demarcate domains of normativity for historical analysis. Only through the study of how different domains of practical life are normativized can we begin to get a conceptual handle on the puzzle of normativity. Seen through the framework I am developing, we can get a better understanding of the two seemingly disparate inquiries he was pursuing: into the development of governmentality in early modern Europe and into truth-telling in ancient Greece. Through the later inquiry, he wanted to get at the specificity and novelty of the concept of truth that enters historical life through Christianity and which seems to have intimate link with norms; the former inquiry could be seen as an attempt to understand how the domain of politics and economy too are normativized. If I am right in interpreting Foucault's project as investigating the different trajectories of normativization that shape the identity of the

Western culture, then we can see it as both continuing and corroborating the secularization thesis formulated by Balagangadhara. The meeting of these two stories helps us understand how Christianity secularizes itself through normativizing domains of practical life. Another description of this process would be: a domain gets normativized when theoretical knowledge seeks to submerge, subjugate, and even, at the limit, substitute itself for practical knowledge. This hypothesis allows us not only to develop a powerful and unifying explanation of different aspects of Western culture (even allowing us to reinterpret the concerns of Marx and Weber in a way that supports our argument), but, more importantly for us, to begin an alternative description of Indian culture. Moreover, when we read Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Foucault as part of our meta-theory of Western theories, resisting normativity becomes a practical philosophical task!

In so far as the domains of practical life forms the object of the human sciences, the argument developed here will enable us to understand why normativity constitutes the main obstacle to its emergence. Furthermore, since the existing social sciences—whether of Europe or India—are either normativizing discourses or secondary elaborations of themes, concepts, classifications that emerge in the process of normativization of different domains that Europe underwent, the task of beginning an alternative description of India, the task of beginning social science, and the task of freeing ourselves from the cognitive enslavement to colonialism are all different descriptions of the same task. How then does one reconceptualize the human sciences? Clearly by plotting the limits of theoretical knowledge as the West has practiced it from within action-knowledge. The program I outlined at the beginning—that of building a meta-theory of Western theories—is one way of formulating what is involved in such a task (the project in fact includes multiple tasks, in so far as action-knowledge functions in multiple domains). But what are the features of action-knowledge that will enable it to do this without transforming itself into theoretical knowledge? There cannot be an *a priori* answer to this, although it should not be forgotten that the task is to draw the limit to, but not reject, theoretical knowledge. The form of what will emerge in this attempt is likely to be *sui generis*.

### **Sketches for a Meta-Theory of Western Theories**

If the West's attempt to understand the otherness of another culture ends up transforming the latter into a variation of itself, and if the same attitude underlies its attempt to understand itself, how do we make sense of its theories about the domains it regards as essential to itself? With this question, I now turn to the moral and political domain theorized by the West; this part will be a lot sketchier than the last two. There is no pretension that the examples I discuss form part of a fully worked out investigation; their sole purpose is to render the larger project plausible. I am now talking about theories—say moral or political—which emerged as a result of the West's attempt to

understand its own experience but which impinge on us. This distinction between Western theories about us and Western theories about its own experiences that nevertheless impinge on us is a matter partly of expositional convenience rather than of any epistemic or qualitative importance (apart, of course, from helping to highlight the scope and ambition of the project) but only partly. The distinction can be used to provide a check or a constraint on how we go about constructing a meta-theory of a theory by specifying its particular domain of problems.

For instance, theories about Indian culture will, as we have seen, typically use or presuppose notions of tradition/practice, action, belief, etc. Now turn to philosophical theories of action, belief, propositional attitudes, practice, truth, etc. Our problem now is not the rather easy one of showing how the ideas from the latter are used in the former (as they indeed are, sometimes consciously). We should be able to show how a set of problems persist in and motivate the theories so far apart otherwise, temporally, methodologically, and substantively. Consider this sample list: tradition/practice is embodiment of beliefs; action is execution of belief (intention, desire); the problem of specifying what is involved in understanding another language (culture, action) is resolved by specifying the requirements of a theory of translation/interpretation, which involves attributing (largely) truths to the alien sentences and true and rational beliefs to aliens (“natives”) uttering those sentences. The philosophical tradition takes specific features and problems and constructs theories that are supposed to apply universally; the sector that busies itself with other cultures finds/attributes (unwittingly validating the philosophical theory of translation/interpretation) the same features and problems in other cultures. No wonder then that the philosophical tradition cannot formulate a theory of cultural difference (think of the arid debates on relativism, the recent debate on multiculturalism), and the anthropological tradition cannot give an account of what it is to understand the other. I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the specific items in the sample; it is sufficient for now if they clarify the distinction between the Western theories of ourselves and the Western theories of its own experience that impinge on us and the methodological purpose or use of that distinction.

The West has generated theories about itself, theories about what it means to be a moral person, to be a citizen, what it is to have moral and political conflicts and how to go about resolving them, and so forth. These theories have generated concepts—rights, sovereignty, autonomy, rationality—which in turn have generated further problems. These theories have been in conflict with one another about the way to formulate the problems, as well as about the interpretation of the concepts used in the formulation and resolution of the problems. Thus, the Kantians and the utilitarians disagree about morality and rationality; the liberals and communitarians disagree about political values; the hermeneuticians and the deconstructionists disagree about interpretation itself (about what it means to interpret a text or an action) and both of them disagree with the positivists. Our task is not to join in these disputes or to choose what

seems to suit us {although that is what we have been doing during our long apprenticeship}; instead, I am suggesting that we ask what these theories tell us about the West, about, to put it in the words of Wittgenstein, how it goes on.

If after the long apprenticeship with the West we now feel that what we say and experience are two different things, it is important to say whether we are asserting (a) it is *something in our experience* that makes the theories we have used to describe ourselves unintelligible, or (b) *something in the nature of Western theories* renders our experience unintelligible or prevents them from speaking about “ourselves” and “our experience.” It is worth spending some time clarifying these two formulations since they lead in radically different directions (the first one in fact leads very quickly to an impasse). Let me explicate the first formulation by recalling what I said about the denial or rejection of our experience. A clear and simple way of understanding what that rejection involved would be this: something in our experience prevents the application or whatever of Western theories; hence, the “something” in our experience, if not the experience as a whole, must be changed, reformed, modified, or rejected. If this sounds bizarre, that is because some of our projects are bizarre! This was however a negative evaluation of our experience (and, correspondingly, a positive evaluation of the normativity of Western theories). But (a) could also be seen (and has been seen) as an attempt to describe our experience of the world. In answering the question “what is it in our experience that makes the Western theories unintelligible?” the focus is on “our experience” and “something” in it. The attempt quickly leads to “despair” because it cannot say what to look for and how to look without using “theory” which turns out to be Western and unintelligible. (It is also possible to interpret (a) as a celebration of the “something,” whatever it may be, that always resists Western theories.)

Turning now to formulation (b), let us note that by focusing on theories, it already specifies, to some extent, the unintelligibility of theories. They are unintelligible because they fail to do what they are supposed to: as theories they are supposed to enable us to describe and conceptualize our experience and they fail to do this. Hence their unintelligibility. This way of putting the matter immediately raises the question: to whom are these theories unintelligible? The only possible answer is: they are (or, more cautiously, must be) unintelligible to whoever uses them to conceptualize our experience and describe ourselves. I suggest that we have plenty of evidence that this is indeed the case: we need only look at the theories of “the caste-system,” “Hinduism,” Indian morality, and so forth. None of them can be said to describe “our experience.” Why, then, talk about Western theories? Why make them the object of our investigations?

The thought is this: the West claims to have theories of the social/cultural world; what we do is study these theories in order to infer about Western culture as part of the process of describing ourselves. Their theory of “other cultures” is a component of their existing theories of their own world. Our meta-theory should tell us why this culture looks at us the way it does. At the

moment, however, there are only Western theories (of themselves and ourselves). How do we then go about saying what in the Western theories makes them unintelligible? We may have intuitions, even a sense of the practices, which allow us an initial distance; by themselves, however, they do not give us reasons for regarding Western theories as inapplicable. Our intuitions could be misleading or entirely wrong. We need to begin to theorize those intuitions in order to generate concepts that can organize those intuitions into problematics to be developed, investigated, and argued about. Because our apprenticeship has been both an obstacle and an enabling condition, our attempt to describe ourselves has to follow a twofold movement; on the one hand, we must pick out the Western theory that impinges on our conflicting intuitions and interrogate it not for what it says or could be made to say about our experience but by specifying the intelligibility condition of the problems which generated these theories in the relevant experiential domain in the West; on the other hand, that interrogation will be undertaken in order to clarify our experiential context, a clarification that should supply the heuristics for the theorization of that context.

An example or two might help. Consider the phenomenon or the institution called morality which by all accounts the West regards as central to its self-understanding. Whenever the West has turned to other cultures—be they the cultures of classical antiquity (Greece and Rome) or of the Indian subcontinent—it has claimed to distinguish itself from, and assert its superiority over, them by claiming that it alone possesses what they lack, namely morality (whose role in creating ontologically peculiar entities we just witnessed). This thing or institution involves a cluster of concepts: the concept of moral law and a certain concept of the self as prior to experience, a concept of action as expression of the will, an absolute distinction between moral and non-moral motives and the related notion of autonomy and heteronomy, a concept of moral obligation as unconditional, a peculiar moral feeling called guilt, a special set of difficulties created by conflict of duties, a conception of blame and its correlative voluntary action, the classification of acts as moral and immoral. This cluster of concepts does impinge on us, sometimes directly (in the form of “the caste-system” or discourse of “corruption”) but often indirectly (in “reform” discourse, “social scientific” judgments, journalistic stereotypes, etc.). They are, however, not particularly intelligible to us (in this of course the Western writers who noted its absence in our culture got something right, whatever one may say about the conclusions they drew from it): in most cases, we have neither the words nor, more importantly, the concepts to capture this domain of morality. As Balagangadhara has often pointed out, the moral “ought” is absent not only in Indian language but all Asian languages. Of course, the absence of a word itself does not show that the concept does not obtain, but it is an important clue, nonetheless. It would be hard to find in any of the Indian languages a word to translate “guilt.” What we have is a much more complex experience which can only be described by using a combination of honor, pride, shame, and humiliation. That, however,

is a domain of practical action firmly embedded in multiple (and multiply ordered) contexts and unintelligible outside of that context. Indeed, in India, the domain of the practical is hard to distinguish from the ethical. In contrast, moral theories deal with a dozen or so moral rules, laws, or injunctions. Or, they set about answering the question: "Why should I be moral?", "Is it rational to be moral?" The sheer quantity of literature on this domain, even if we restrict ourselves to the last few decades, is truly astonishing. This is an extremely rich problematic that needs to be developed at length. The point, however, is or should be clear.

What we now need to do is to initiate the double movement I spoke of above: interrogate the Western theories of morality to construct a meta-theory which specifies the intelligibility conditions of the claims and problems of those theories. This involves, it bears repeating, explaining in terms intelligible to the West how, if at all, they make sense of notions such as moral law or the concept of self, prior to experience. We need to construct a theory precisely because we could not make sense of their theories: because they did not capture any significant feature of our experience. But the question that the meta-theory of moral theories has to clarify is: what must be the nature of this domain of Western experience such that theorizing of it produces impoverished and un-illuminating reflections on a handful of laws or rules? In constructing such a meta-theory, we will be bringing to bear the range of our experiences which now includes not only our intuitive sense of our own practices but also what we have learned of/from the West itself. Hence, the act of this construction is at the same time *a reflexive grasp of our own experiential context*. The theory that we construct must not only be cognitively productive for us, but it should at the same time say something cognitively interesting about the West too. It is important to notice that this is not a relativizing move, that is, the claim is not that the Western moral theories capture or adequately conceptualize (some specific kind of features of) Western experience. As we already had the occasion to notice, our meta-theory is raising a deep question about why morality seems to do violence to experience, to the domain of practical life.

On another plane, consider the problem of rights: what makes these rights fundamental? The Western moral and political theories try to answer by mobilizing a cluster of concepts such as sovereignty, freedom, dominion, duty, moral law, and so forth. Since we regard the question of rights as important for us, but cannot really make sense of the justification of those rights, we have no option but to undertake the project I have been outlining. What the task calls for is neither intellectual or political history of natural rights (of the type to be found in, say, Skinner, Finnis, Berman, or Tuck), nor an exegesis of, say, Aquinas, Grotius, Kant, Rawls, and Dworkin, but the construction of a domain of problems that persists not only from Aquinas to Rawls but also appears in very different theories or fields. But instead of asking what sense these problems have, we ask what kind of an audience it must be for the problems to make sense to it. The idea is to delineate

hypothetically the possible structure of an audience and the structure of its experience that can make sense of these problems. Consider in this context Rawls's doctrine of political liberalism (Rawls, 1993). Rawls presents this doctrine as a framework for resolving the question of how liberal society can accommodate/tolerate multiculturalism. Consequently, he says that this doctrine does not claim truth itself (if it did, it would be one more "comprehensive doctrine" imposing its own conception of the good on others with different conceptions of the good). He cannot however present it merely as a *modus vivendi*, for then its appeal would be weakened. He therefore claims that it is a moral conception, though it denies truth to itself. This is strange and incomprehensible, indeed. It would be a mistake, however, to see this as a problem local to Rawls's theory (its inconsistency, or lack of rigor, or whatever). It is the problem inherited by any conception of natural rights which does not or cannot use the theological resolution of the problem (moral law is divine and hence true). So, Rawls not only has a problem in conceptualizing multiculturalism, his attempted framework looks unintelligible. Multiculturalism, cultural difference, theorizing otherness turn up as unresolved problems in very different places. Therefore, our inference about the limiting structures of an audience and its experience must help us generate the problems which those different theories in some particular domain try to resolve.

Perhaps the point can be made with regard to secularism, which continues to generate much passion and rhetoric but little clarity. Addressing this issue will also enable me to tie up the two aspects of the project I have discussed so far and to show how such a project renders intelligible the links between abstract theoretical problems and pressing political issues. To begin, consider some of the consequences of Balagangadharā's meta-theory of Christianity. Secularization (along with proselytization) is the dynamic religion; the political doctrine of secularism makes sense in the context of culture that exhibits that dynamic. That Hinduism is a religion was the hypothesis of Western theorists who sought to explain Indian culture. As Balagangadharā demonstrates, that hypothesis and the theories used to prove it tell us more about Western culture than about Indian culture. They fail to show that Hinduism is an identifiable domain individuated by religion. It may seem as though we are now confronted with the question "What is Hinduism, if it is not a religion?" Actually though, we do not need to address that question at all, at least not in that form, for that hypothesis makes sense only as the attempt of one culture to theorize another culture. Outside of that hypothesis and the theories generated by it, "Hinduism" does not capture anything. If that is indeed the case, what are our social scientists saying when they claim that Indian culture is insufficiently or weakly secular or that the state must be thoroughly secular?

When pressed, the social scientists come up with utterly confused statements such as the following: "Secularism is more than laws, concessions at special considerations. It is a state of mind, almost an instinctive feeling"

(Gopal, 1991). This hardly distinguishes secularism from, say, mysticisms indeed, from what social scientists have often said about religion. The point is not the vacuity, however well-meaning, of this particular statement; most pronouncements on secularism tend to be garbled and cliché-ridden. It would be nothing short of a miracle if it were to turn out that this ill-defined doctrine and process were the only things preventing our slide into “medieval barbarism.” What is truly remarkable is that these *theological* problems and themes have become both the presupposition and result of *Indian* social science and political theory. What we have failed to understand is that concepts such as rights or sovereignty are not theoretical or political solutions but are the terms with which one culture has tried to formulate its problems.

The secularists often accuse the Hindu nationalists of being revivalist indigenists and so forth (thus the constant invocation of medieval barbarian to characterize the Bharatiya Janata Party). The idea or perhaps the fear is that they are anti-modern (anti-Western); hence, the recourse to the authority of a Western doctrine (and hence also the suspicion of any criticism of secularism). The secularists have got this completely wrong. The Hindu nationalists’ program attempts to forge a tight link between territorial sovereignty and/or ethnic group. In this, they are very close to the West, for this indeed was/is the project of the nation-states in Europe. Will the Hindu right succeed in its program of linking territory, sovereignty, and ethnicity? I doubt it, for the simple reason that “Hindu” does not individuate anything, which does not, of course, mean that the attempt will have no consequences. On the other hand, the secularist narrative, which has been telling the story of our incomplete modernization or secularization, is also committed to the sovereignty project, except that in place of the ethnicization politics they propose a secularization politics. That the sovereignty project based on ethnicization is dangerous by itself does not validate the sovereignty project based on secularization. Do we have another political language in which to address or reformulate the problem? The truth is that we do not. All I have suggested is that such a language can only emerge when we actually begin the process of (re)describing ourselves and our way of going about in the world.

We are back to the question of valorizing the present. In the process of outlining that project, I hope I have persuaded you that to describe or theorize our present we have to undertake the construction of a meta-theory of Western theories, a description of the West, which initiates at the same time a return to our own experience. What I have called our apprenticeship has been an experience of detour. Indeed, the meta-theory of Western theories yields a narrative epistemology of our detour,<sup>14</sup> our enslavement to normativity; it reflexively initiates at the same time return as a practical epistemology of action-knowledge. The hope is that the practical epistemological account will be experience-preserving because the success of the project depends on making our experience constitutive of it. Only then can it resist and repulse normativity. The valorization of the present then is nothing other than, but also nothing less than the construction of an idiom—using the resources of theoretical,

practical, and perhaps a new practico-theoretical reasoning—which, unlike the existing human sciences, will be both knowledge-preserving and experience-preserving. Here, we have a virtuous circle: decolonization of the human sciences is at the same time its reconceptualization. Reconceptualization is drawing on the resources of a de-normativized, de-colonized intellectual tradition of India and its cultural learnings.

## Notes

- 1 Of the many works one could cite here, see Chakrabarty (1995) and Van der Veer (1994). One wonders then about what the rallying cry of provincializing Europe really amounts to!
- 2 It is important to note how different this project is from the critique of Eurocentricity discourse, which is essentially a moralizing discourse that again perpetuates the orientalist discourse without the latter's bracing nastiness; now, the nasty remarks are not only reserved for, indeed directed at the "bad" objects—Brahmins, upper-castes, etc.; the whole academic enterprise consists of seeking them out no matter what phenomenon you are examining.
- 3 Historically, when Christianity emerged in the midst of diverse flourishing "cults" that made up the Roman world, it had to answer questions about its past, its tradition. In a culture where the *religio* was valued because it consisted of *traditio* spanning generations, Christianity had no answer about the ancientness of its past. It solved or side-stepped the problem by claiming allegiance to a doctrine, a true doctrine, revealed only to it. The answer, a mistake in one sense, proved to be a stroke of genius, indeed.
- 4 It would be a mistake to understand practical knowledge or action-knowledge in terms of Rylean "knowing how," since action-knowledge is not simply a skill (see Balagangadhara, 1987). While that is correct, we will have to ask why Balagangadhara so quickly settles on Rylean category mistake as the right characterization of the Christian representation of pagan practices as susceptible of truth and falsity. How to understand what is "truth and falsity" here?
- 5 The *Vaçana* tradition of Karnataka, which I mention below, actually talks about *kriya-jnana*, literally action-knowledge.
- 6 I am deliberately using the term "representation" because it also brings into focus the unique structure that theology develops between God, Jesus, and the flock, which seems to replicate itself in morality, politics, and art and presents yet another set of puzzles about how these emerge as secular domains.
- 7 So called because it is Saul Kripke's rigorous reconstruction of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following which brought the paradox to the attention of the philosophical community (Kripke, 1982; also see Schiffer, 1989 and McDowell, 1984)
- 8 We need to take seriously the problem of what Wittgenstein tellingly called 'loss of problems.' Some philosophers (or whatever you like to call them) suffer from what may be called 'loss of problems.' Then, everything seems quite simple to them, no deep problems seem to exist anymore, the world becomes broad and flat and loses all depth, and what they write becomes immeasurably shallow and trivial. Russell and H.G. Wells suffer from this (Wittgenstein, 1967: #456). This would seem to be true of much philosophical writing today, whether continental or Anglo-American.
- 9 It's this self-admonition and the metaphoric force of declaring that in the beginning was the deed that made me characterize what Wittgenstein was doing in his later work as "reversing" the category mistake. Also, I have gone along (as does

Balagangadhara) with an intuitive understanding of the category mistake involved in treating practice as though it were a proposition. In the concluding chapter, I shall both replace category mistake with a formally more rigorously formulated idea of “categorial error” and re-elaborate “reversing” as “duality construction,” with the help of the conceptual resources built up in the previous chapters.

- 10 It's unclear how any of the candidates—reason, reflection, autonomy—or any combination of them can actually succeed without presupposing what they are supposed to provide. Perhaps to end this futile exercise, Robert Nozick settled on an evolutionarily wired “normativity module” (Nozick, 2001: 270)!
- 11 Does normativization have to be forever “an incomplete task” in the secular-Christian world or can one foresee a situation where, like the natural sciences liberated the study of nature from the grip of normativity, we will see a science of ethics liberating the practical world from normativity? I shall not pause here to answer that question or to speculate on what a science of ethics or practical knowledge might look like, except to note that the last chapter provides a different perspective altogether.
- 12 The deeper significance of this remark will emerge in the concluding chapter where we arrive at a practical epistemology that necessitates a radical revision of the idea of category mistake and prompts a reconsideration of the theory of cultural difference.
- 13 While there is something to the pragmatic use explanation for the continued use of entities such as “Hinduism” and “the caste-system,” it is not entirely satisfactory. And it is also doubtful if only intellectuals are enslaved by the orientalist/colonial perspective. We will see in Chapter 3 that is not entirely the case. My characterization of these entities as “ontologically peculiar” seeks a more satisfactory account of what normativizing does to a domain of practical knowledge. As I have already noted, we will return to these questions better equipped in the concluding chapter.
- 14 I sketch a personal example of such a detour in the concluding chapter.

## 2 Politics, Experience, and Cognitive Enslavement

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*

Who can argue us out of our experience?

—M.K. Gandhi<sup>1</sup>

### Colonialism and Violence

There are two parts or aspects to Gandhi's understanding and rejection of colonialism and of the civilization that produced it. Both have to do with the inherent destructiveness of colonialism (and, of course, of the civilization it represents). But there seem to be two aspects because there are two different sets of questions involved. We get hold of the first with: what does colonialism destroy? And what is involved in the resistance to this destruction which requires that decolonization or attaining swaraj is something more or, at any rate, something other than throwing the colonizers out of the country? The other aspect has to do with why Western civilization is inherently destructive, unethical, or violent, even though the men who represent it are not inherently all that? What makes it inherently destructive? There is a depth and simplicity to Gandhi's answer to the first set of questions which is missing or which I cannot find in his answer to the second set. At this point, it's perhaps too easily said, and that is why I don't want to say it, that, indeed, there are no two aspects to Gandhi's understanding and that it is my inability to appreciate the true depth of his answer to the first set of questions that makes me look in two different directions. That may well be the case. We can, however, settle that issue later, if the question this chapter is straining to get hold of emerges with any degree of clarity in my exploration of the two aspects of Gandhi's understanding. And that question has to do with the deeper integrity of Gandhi's thought which, as Akeel Bilgrami (2003) has argued,<sup>2</sup> may not be apparent on the surface or in the disparate remarks Gandhi makes on colonialism, experience, and culture.

Now to the answer which I say is deep and simple: Gandhi was convinced that colonialism is destructive of the very integrity of experience. It is deep because it immediately brings up the question of what constitutes a form of life

and what conditions are needed for its continued existence and flourishing? It is simple because anyone faced with the onslaught of colonialism would understand what that meant and would have had to find a way of preserving the integrity of his/her way of life in the face of that onslaught. Gandhi himself found that answering the question of how to live necessarily involved driving out Western civilization. Therefore, though he was not interested in politics, he found that he had to practice satyagraha in the domain politics too. The question of how to live and how to go about in the world in such a way that the integrity of experience is preserved is, Gandhi discovered, the central preoccupation that shaped the form of life—Indian civilization, to use his terms—that was being undermined by colonialism and its civilization. So, the defense of that form of life meant the defense of the integrity of experience itself, for Gandhi clearly saw colonialism as an attempt to “argue us out of our experience.” But to the extent that colonialism was a cultural phenomenon rooted in the West as a civilization, he was convinced that swaraj was not only a goal for India but for the West too.

What makes the Western civilization destructive of experience? It's certainly not the men who represent that civilization; that's why Gandhi wants to say that the British need not leave India as long as they are willing to Indianize (in the civilizational rather than the nationalist sense) themselves. What then enslaves them to a civilization that is so destructive? Or, to pick up the same question from the other side, in what way does the form of life that is India gets undermined by the presence of Western civilization? Here, unlike in the West, it's Indian men—some of them, not the villagers—who succumb to colonialism; it's no fault of their civilization. Gandhi insists on this non-symmetry; again, if this non-symmetry has any deep and integrated explanation, it has to be located in some features of the respective civilizations. Gandhi, it seems to me, does have such an explanation but we have to “mine” his work for it (to use his own phrase for how one should read the *Gita*). To start with, let me give a very broad outline of it (leaving the elaboration to the rest of the chapter): ethical learning in the West does not provide the kind of self-knowledge needed to conceptualize and counter the violence the West generates, and hence, the Westerners cannot be blamed for the evils of the civilization they represent; whereas Indian traditions have structured reflection on experience in such a way that self-knowledge is the ultimate ethical goal and therefore Indian men are to be blamed for betraying their own civilization. Still, the prior question remains: what makes Western civilization violent or, what comes to the same thing, destructive of experience?

### **House of Dharma**

Let's begin with some of Gandhi's explicit remarks about these matters. For example, we know what he says about lawyers, doctors, and railways and how they could be disruptive of the ideal of swaraj. The intuition behind this denunciation of things modern is clarified at a more abstract level when he

considers modern civilization undesirable because of the “ceaseless activity” it represents and “the annihilation of space and time” it aims at (Gandhi, 2001, 11: 74). What has brought about this state of affairs is the West’s “relentless pursuit of a false ideal conceived as truth.”<sup>3</sup> Gandhi says that “evil has wings,” meaning thereby, I take it, that the things or objects such as railways that embody speed or the destruction of time and space undermine or destroy the necessarily slow work of establishing the good or *Dharma* which takes “a long time”: “To build a house takes time. Its destruction takes none” (Gandhi, 1997: 48). Why is this house so fragile? Or, to put it less poetically, why is the bullock-cart a better vehicle—metaphorically or otherwise—for the work of establishing the good, for the building and preserving of the house of *Dharma* than, say, the motor car? In what way is Gandhi’s beloved postcard better or good in itself than the electronic mail, whose instantaneity would make it evil itself (or may be not; the very instantaneity might reestablish the space-time configuration. I’m far from being facetious in raising such questions). Does it perhaps have something to do with the nature of techne itself? Is it the case that the bullock-cart is built with skilled hands and I can understand and even learn how to do so, but railways or the Internet makes me dependent, vicarious, or ignorant? What’s the material out of which the house of *Dharma* is built such that it’s more responsive to some objects and concepts and not others? If that material is experience itself, how can it be that experience is more responsive to some objects/concepts/practices and not others? There is something elusive here. Let’s try to get hold of it by asking, why are there only lawyers, doctors, and railways on Gandhi’s list? Why not other objects, professions, concepts, or practices, and, more importantly, how do we decide? Sympathetic treatment of these remarks, aimed at clarifying and deepening Gandhi’s intuitions about violence, could perhaps take us some distance, but I think would still fall short of what we are seeking, namely, the source of the kind of violence unleashed by colonialism and the West. The larger problem here lies not with Gandhi’s remarks, but with the frame that has always been used to understand Gandhi. We have for so long persisted in interpreting Gandhi as an anti-modern, taking it for granted that we understand what modernity is and what it is to be against it, we have never bothered to even ask what the frame of modernity is all about. There are strands in Gandhi’s thinking that might seem to suggest that he seeks decolonization by identifying objects or practices that are disruptive of or inhospitable to the house of *Dharma*. Some of his remarks certainly mislead us in this direction. That, however, cannot be what Gandhi had in mind. Our life with concepts and objects was always complete.<sup>4</sup> It was so before railways, relativity, or the Internet, but it was so before the postcard and the bullock-cart too. New objects or concepts do not themselves disturb or undermine the integrity of experience. So, what does? When does a sense of incompleteness enter our life with concepts and objects? I want to explore the idea that what underlies Gandhi’s rejection of colonialism is that he thought that the norms that come through law, medicine, politics, or history begin to occlude experience. That is to say, these norms begin to dictate how experience must or ought to stand

in relation to “facts,” “concepts,” and “practices.” Because the modernity frame is so deeply entrenched in our minds that we persist in seeing Gandhi as opposed to industrialization, to modern medicine, or to science in general, without pausing to reflect on Gandhi’s conception of the integrity of experience that grounds his attitude both to the object domain and action domain as such in the most abstract or philosophical sense, and not merely to this or that object, whether modern or traditional. The task is to explicate that grounding or, what amounts to the same thing, that theory of ethical learning with its distinctive conception of truth and knowledge. To bring out the philosophical underpinning of that attitude into sharper relief, I will focus on how we might extend Gandhian insight into the integrity of experience to elaborate a critique of modern politics.

### Experience-Occluding Structures

Experience is all there is. This is not an innocuous notion because the next question is: how do structures arise that occlude it? For that is Gandhi’s concern and his critique is directed not against “modernity” but against structures that occlude experience. Now, here is a test case for deciding or, at any rate, exploring whether the latter helps us understand Gandhi’s philosophical concerns in a deeper and more coherent way than the modernity argument has allowed us to. The way I read Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*, the philosophical arguments Gandhi presupposes or the perspective he brings to bear on the following issues are all of a piece or, in Bilgrami’s terminology, integrated: medicine, technology, on the one hand, and religion, law, history, and nationalism, on the other.<sup>5</sup> Let me just set aside the elaborate stage-setting needed and go directly to the two very obscure but in my view, very deep remarks, Gandhi makes: one has to do with his claim (or, more accurately, his implied claim) that Hinduism is not a religion like others, that it is a religion that underlies all religion; the other about how no two Indians are one as no two Englishmen are. Both are highly misleading if one does not read Gandhi *de re*.

Very quickly, the way my perspective hopes to deliver the integrity involved here is by locating the experience-occluding structures present in all these areas: nationalism, law, history, medicine, and, what we now want to consider, politics. Where does the remark about Hinduism as the religion underlying all religion fit in? He does not quite say that here,<sup>6</sup> but I want to take that to be the implication of his claim that India has increasingly become irreligious. He is explicitly contrasting religion as inquiry—“religion which underlies all religions”—with religion as identity (1997: 42).<sup>7</sup> In my reading, he is really saying that what we take to be Hinduism points to traditions of reflecting on experience and it’s these traditions that allow Gandhi to diagnose and resist experience-occluding structures in different domains. Scientism may not be a bad name for this structure as long as we are clear that it’s not only the scientism of the familiar kind but also the scientism of the human sciences.<sup>8</sup> Pursuing Gandhi’s intuitions about violence and Western civilization has led me into an examination of how Gandhi wants us to think about

our life with concepts and objects. Before we go any further, let's ask if this perspective also extends to the domain that we familiarly, if rather vaguely, call politics. Although Gandhi never explicitly addresses "modern politics" in Hind Swaraj, I think it is a legitimate question to ask how he would have viewed it, given what he says about medicine, law, history, nationalism, and so forth. Let's therefore explore whether the Gandhian consideration that I very briefly sketched above allows us to evolve a critique of left/liberal conception of politics: to see that modern politics itself in a deeper sense as experience-occluding and to argue that the only viable conception of politics is the one that conceives of it, as Gandhi did, as an activity that concerns itself with removing or resisting experience-occluding structures and with creating structures hospitable to preserving the integrity of experience. Gandhi's satyagraha was an attempt to set up sites of ethical learning that would again enable us to reflect on experience. It does not matter much whether we see this as "anti-politics" or as an alternative conceptualization of politics. Gandhian considerations about experience becoming occluded or inaccessible and the way to remove it or resist it or reflect on the reasons for that inaccessibility calls for nothing less than a large conceptual story about the very different ways in which experiences are occluded or concealed in the West and in India, especially since the argument that experience is becoming inaccessible clearly wants to hold on to the idea that experience and reflection on it are still possible.

Although we familiarly talk about the left and the right, a moment's reflection will make clear that whatever differences those terms are meant to capture, they don't bear upon the conception of politics itself. The historical component of this proposition would involve showing how reform and representation, the two pedagogic projects of colonialism, structured Indian politics (but not only politics) in such a way that it continues to reproduce the colonial framework long after the colonizers have departed. While it is out of the question to even briefly reconstruct the late 19th- and early 20th-century processes that set up these structures, I will be touching upon the slightly more abstract or philosophical question of what these structures do to the transmission of what I have been calling ethical learning. For the moment, I want to focus on the conception of politics as the left conceives of it or practices it. There are several reasons why it would be important to have a characterization of left/liberal politics. My concern here is specifically to show how we can explicate Gandhian philosophical concerns (as I am interpreting or reconstructing it) to capture its essence, as it were.

### **Normative Zone**

To begin with the present, then, I would like to argue that politics (for the left/liberal) has consisted in placing items from the social in a normative zone. An example will make clear what I have in mind. As we know, for a long time in the 20th century, left politics, such as it was, was organized around an entity called the proletariat. The task of the Marxian social and political

theory then became one of deciphering how this entity could be related to the “group” in the empirical world called the workers (and to various other strata, such as peasantry, who could be placed in some sort scale of “radicalness” first to the workers and then to the proletariat). One way of quickly getting a grip on the nature of left politics (in India, but elsewhere too) is to plot the story of how the proletariat came to occupy the normative zone and how many other entities have, either simultaneously or successively, occupied that zone, especially after the proletariat seems to have soundlessly vacated that place. These entities have been of various kinds, in fact not only agencies like proletariat, women, Dalit, and their corresponding properties, class, gender, and caste, respectively, but also attitudes, policies, and objects, for example, secularism, toleration, reservation, human rights, and now perhaps the constitution. I am merely registering a superficial description of the process, but what needs to be probed is not these items themselves so much as the zone. What is it about this zone that creates this magical or opaque relationship between the entities in it and, as it were, their empirical or factual counterpart? Some characteristics are readily noticeable: politics of fear or prohibition against any kind of inquiry about the items or the logic behind placing them in the zone, the kind of history that the items require or call for, the insulation from experience that norming of experience produces; the so-called humans sciences take on the task of ensuring the passage of “entities” (the ontologically peculiar entities) into the normative zone. (That is the reason for the peculiar and spectacular weddedness to concepts in the so-called human sciences<sup>9</sup>; thus, theories die, but concepts produced by them live on!) But quite clearly if we have to speak of democracy differently, we need to begin by removing it from that zone, where, of late, the leftist/liberal/subalterns have tended to place it.<sup>10</sup>

But the question of the zone, however, is really about why in particular politics, as we now know it, cannot really be understood without a conceptual history of secularization as a specifically Western cultural experience. Secularization involves the normativization of domains in practical life (ethics, politics, erotics), which give rise to experience-occluding structures. Gandhi, in my view, was trying to get hold of these structures when he comments on Western civilization’s violent and enslaving effect on its own people and on Indian culture. It’s worth noting here that the reluctance or even the fear to talk about cultural difference has a lot to do with the normative zone and the prohibition it places. Gandhi was unafraid to talk about cultural difference. For example, Gandhi held that the civilization of the West is based on “self-indulgence,” whereas the Indian one is based on “self-control” or “self-restraint,”<sup>11</sup> or, as we discussed above, when he sought a non-symmetrical explanation for the respective unethicability of the West and the East.

We have so far tried to reflect on and characterize what the left took to be politics in India. Although we have taken the example of Marxism since it is more familiar to us, perhaps the underlying abstract point is true of classical liberalism as well—individual with his autonomous self. More generally, we can characterize the left/liberal conception of politics as an activity that uses

the state to advance its objectives, be it solving social problems or legislating new laws or redesigning institutions. Implicit in that characterization was an attempt to evolve a critique of left/liberal conception of politics. In a way, that task will involve specifying the senses in which the framework of Indian politics—shared by both the left and the right—is still colonial. Is it possible that politics itself—the conception, the domain of institutions and activities that we call politics—has contributed to the perpetuation of the colonial framework? If the answer were to be in the affirmative, as I am inclined to think it is, what are the implications for conceptualizing the link between secularization and politics in the West? How do we interrogate the philosophical concepts that are central to modern politics and that we in India take to be central to the way we organize our institutions?

### **Political Rationality and History**

There is both an echo of Gandhi's thought and the kind of conceptual story of Western experience we are looking for in Foucault's last lectures on the different models of the cultures of the self in the West. Noting how certain expressions that permeate the contemporary discourse—getting back to oneself, freeing oneself, being authentic, and so on—how these expressions have become hollow and the attempts made to reconstitute an ethics of the self have remained blocked, ossified, or without any content, Foucault explicitly entertains the possibility that the contemporary West may simply find it impossible to “constitute an ethic of the self” (2005: 251).<sup>12</sup> This despair is, if you like, historically grounded, for this reflection occurs in the course of an investigation that uncovers and reconstructs a model of the culture of the self, or care of the self, or self-knowledge, that had stretched from 4th century BC to 4th century CE, which Foucault calls the Hellenistic-Roman (HR) model, to contrast it with the more familiar Platonic and the Christian model. This model had disappeared from the European scholarship and memory. The care of the self that this HR model articulated through its “long summer” (as Foucault puts it) had an ethics of the self, a conception of truth, practices, and a way of organizing domains of experience such as dietetics, erotics, economy, which were all radically different from what we find in the Christian and Platonic models (this last largely absorbed by the former). In giving us a genealogical reconstruction of this model of the care of the self and its salient diversities, Foucault also attempts something novel and audacious: to show how the culture of the care of the self permeates and even begins to elaborate the social. Normally, we attach very little epistemic significance to “social structures” (think of its use in Marxism and in social theory generally). The social, however, is not dumb, though it may be mute because of the kind of knowledge it embodies. Now, Foucault shows how the knowledge transmitted by the HR culture of the self, what he explicitly terms “spiritual knowledge” (and what I, following Balagangadhara, call experiential knowledge), begins to be attacked, undermined by the Christian model. The opposition is

between religion and spiritual knowledge and not between science and spiritual knowledge. The disappearance of HR model and with it of spiritual knowledge coincides with the emergence of intellectual knowledge (*connaissance*), knowledge of objects, and elaboration of a different configuration of truth and subjectivity. (Descartes being an illustrious instance of this transformation which continues in the rationalist tradition. Foucault, I think wants to argue that the other model, distorted and rendered oblique, continues in Hegel and Marx in one way and in the 19th-century revolutionary tradition in another way.)

For Foucault, it's clear that the spiritual knowledge or, in our terms, experiential knowledge disappears in the West, and I think there is a way in which one can productively reconstruct Foucault's own research to pose clear questions about how that came about in Europe and what light it throws on politics and what he calls the juridification of European culture. This is conjectural but receives some support from and converges on Foucault's exploration of the emergence of what he calls "political rationality" precisely during the period in question (Foucault's concept of rationality can be best glossed in my language as the norm-generated/norm-generating practices). His concern is to show how Machiavelli's advice to the Prince, and the conception of the state and politics that figures there, is radically different from what begins to emerge in the "police" literature. A new relation begins to develop between "politics as a practice and as knowledge." He explicitly marks out the difference between how, say, St. Thomas Aquinas would conceptualize the state or king's duty and how the "police" literature talks about the state. The state that begins to be conceptualized is an entirely new entity and the rationality that develops around that time is what grounds modern political concepts and theories. Now, it seems to me that the changes in history too are grounded in this rationality: politics and history once grounded in this rationality are no longer what they were in the medieval period, and certainly, even more different than what they were in Antiquity. The link between happiness, virtue, and politics in Aristotle, for example, still present in Christianized form in medieval discourse, would be no longer even comprehensible from the "police" discourse on state's concern with society's happiness. In *Society Must be Defended* (2003), Foucault shows the further development and entanglement of politics and history, but the "historical consciousness" is already at work. But as Foucault keeps insisting vis-à-vis politics, the changes cannot be registered or located at the level of political theories or concepts:

First, it is possible to analyze political rationality, as it is possible to analyze any scientific rationality. Of course, this political rationality is linked with other forms of rationality...Since political rationality is the root of a great number of postulates, evidence of all sorts, institutions and ideas we take for granted, it is both theoretically and practically important to go on with this historical criticism, the historical analysis

of our political rationality, which is something different from the discussion about political theories and which is different also from divergences between different political choices. The failure of the major political theories nowadays must lead not to a nonpolitical way of thinking but to an investigation of what has been our political way of thinking during this century...the failure of political theories is probably due neither to politics nor to theories but to the type of rationality in which they are rooted.

(2002b: 416–17, *my italics*)

Something similar or related needs to be said about history, its dynamic emergence and laying claim to the past. Because its rootedness in this rationality is not thematized at the appropriate level, philosophical discussion of history's relationship with politics remains so unsatisfactory and superficial; at the level where Foucault locates the question, modern history and politics can only be seen as twins produced by a particular rationality. It's not a question of the political uses of history; history and politics are the normed and norming products of each other. The two consequences Foucault notes in *Society Must be Defended* are important:

So we have on the one hand a knowledge that has effectively been disciplinarianized to form a historical discipline, and on the other hand, a historical consciousness that is polymorphous, divided and combative. It is simply the other side, the other face of a political consciousness.

(2003: 186)

Foucault's genealogy of the domain of history and politics is trying to say something radically different from the point most intellectual historians would readily concede, namely, the philosophical underpinnings of the two concepts. He is arguing that the emergence of both political and historical consciousnesses was the result, if you like, of "a self-dialecticization of historical discourse, and it occurred independently of any explicit transposition—or any explicit utilization – of a dialectical philosophy into a historical discourse" (2003: 237). So, when in the name of empirical history, one criticizes or rejects teleological or dialectical history, the effect is indeed paradoxical; the standpoint of empirical history cannot quite realize that its own intelligibility is being rejected. If the modern citizen cannot anymore understand his own historical consciousness or see how the latter grounded his "abstract" identity, how can empirical history ground or give a new identity? What opens up here is what I have been calling the normative zone. In order to understand how this "normative zone" comes about and how the human sciences contribute to installing new entities in that zone, we need to add richer determinations to the theory of secularization of Europe, which was outlined in the first chapter. In fact, Foucault's genealogy of what he calls "the permanent anthropologism" of the West already contains rich material for such a theory:

I think that one of the great problems of Western culture has been to find the possibility of founding the hermeneutics of the self not, as was in early Christianity, on the sacrifice of the self but, on the contrary, on a positive, on the theoretical and practical emergence of the self. That was the aim of judicial institutions, that was the aim also of medical and psychiatric practices, that was the aim of political and philosophical theory—to constitute the ground of the subjectivity as the root of a positive self, what we could call the permanent anthropologism of Western thought.<sup>13</sup>

(Foucault, 1999: 180)

What I have been trying to suggest is that the secularization process that lays the foundation for the positive self to emerge does so by destroying the practices that had sustained what Foucault calls spiritual knowledge. In this process, what we call “theories” of politics or history emerge as normed reflections, only opaquely related to what they claim to understand. It is possible to enumerate the identical features of “theories” in such normed domains as “sexuality” and “the caste-system,” to which we can add “politics.” I suppose we can now appreciate the full force of the colonial charge that Indian culture lacks history: it lacks politics too; they cannot govern themselves. Politics then needs history in this precise sense and vice versa. How is the charge met and what did it mean to give oneself politics or history?

### Access to the Practical/Experiential

What I have done so far is to sketch the merest outline of the conceptual story we need to understand, the sense in which one can talk about different cultures accessing experience differently, and to grasp the different ways in which experience is destroyed, driven underground, or rendered inaccessible. But even this outline, potted as it is, is enough to appreciate the significance of the Gandhian question about the experience-occluding structures that begin to disrupt the transmission of ethical leaning in a culture whose “bedrock” is constituted by experiential/practical knowledge. The genealogical investigations that such a question opens up are likely to be both formidable and fruitful. For example, because in this culture experiential knowledge quite clearly occupied a far more significant position in social life than in Greco-Roman culture, we need to ask how other modes of knowledge were related to or formed by experiential knowledge. With appropriate philosophical and conceptual equipment, such questions can be pursued, but the more urgent question is what has happened to experiential/practical knowledge in this culture—quite clearly, it has not disappeared but equally clearly, it is not easily accessible. Our self-understanding (and not only as academics, needless to say) too crucially depends on completing the conceptual story about the transformation or destruction of experiential knowledge in the West and its underground existence in India. Gandhi clearly saw that without rearticulating the

objective of swaraj, which is impossible to achieve without experiential knowledge, Indians are condemned to cognitive enslavement.

Gandhi achieved this insight by accessing what the Indian traditions transmitted as ethical learning or experiential knowledge. It may appear that certain facts and objects—bullock-carts, villages, etc.—were fused into the language-games of these traditions—but only contingently. Gandhi was profoundly right to see colonialism as an onslaught on the integrity of experience itself since the integrity of this language-game was sought to be destroyed. But it seems to me that it is a profound mistake to read him as claiming that those contingent facts or objects are necessary for sustaining ethical learning. To think that is to think that there are objects and practices that are, as it were, peculiarly suited to our interests; that is, to believe that knowledge about the world or propositional knowledge about objects gives us self-knowledge. It is to be ignorant of the nature of intentionality itself. This is not to deny that there's a difficult question here about hospitable structures needed to conceive of living itself as a form of inquiry (as in fact the prototype of all inquiry). But that question is not a normative question; it would indeed be reassuring if there were norms or truths that made that inquiry unnecessary. Religion and its secularized counter-parts such as politics is an attempt to instill the belief that there are such norms and truths.<sup>14</sup>

In fashioning his resistance to colonialism, Gandhi realized that the traditions of experiential knowledge itself have been damaged or hollowed out. That is to say, he clearly realized that the transmission of ethical learning has been obstructed, driven underground, and distorted. He was expressing this realization when he argued in *Hind Swaraj* that India has become irreligious. In recovering its original problematic and in restoring its integrity, he used terminologies and strategies that can often be an obstacle to understanding his insight—I have in mind his use of terms such as “religion,” “Hinduism,” “morality,” or his particular practices. Studies of Gandhi often get caught in shuffling around these terminologies or in speculating on his particular strategies, as though what is important is what Gandhi thought about the world. I have not attempted any terminological reform; it can be undertaken after we get hold of his problematic. In suggesting that what is important is how Gandhi went about reflecting on his experience in a way that enabled him to perform action without conception, I am of course implying that his particular conceptions—about villages or spinning or even “the caste-system”—are not binding on us.<sup>15</sup>

For, after all what does the *Gita*—or the tradition of experiential knowledge from which he drew his strength—teach: how to think about experience and action and not what to think about.<sup>16</sup> The *Gita* is not a description of the world; it does not contain propositional knowledge about the world or beliefs about the world. No knowledge of the world or the truths about the world helps in the performance of right action. *Dharma* can only be set by examples; but exemplary action is precisely the one that does not exemplify anything. Exemplary action is action without conception. The *sthithaprajna* or

satyagrahi is the one who knows how to perform action without conception, how to separate the “entity” or upadhi the action nevertheless requires for its execution (we will return to this in the subsequent chapters). He needs self-knowledge, which is not knowledge about the world and cannot be construed on the model of propositional or factual knowledge. Self-knowledge, however, cannot be taught by examples; only *Dharma* can be set by examples or by exemplary actions.

Experience or Truth (*Sat*) is not an object.<sup>17</sup> Objectual thinking brings in predication to bear on experience too, thus making the problem of truth in relation to experience impossible to handle. Truth in experience is attainable precisely because experience is not an object. It is the association of truth with objectual thinking that has made truth an intractable concept. Truth, in the Gandhian sense, is neither a property of sentences nor of propositions; truth bearers are neither sentences nor propositions. Literally truth bearers are persons; more accurately, experience is the only truth bearer. If there is experiential knowledge and it involves overcoming ignorance (*avidya*), how to think of ignorance? In objectual thinking, ignorance is absence of information. If experience is not an object, what possible sense can there be to the idea that experiential knowledge overcomes ignorance? The answer, I think, is simple: the ignorance here is ignorance about the non-objectual nature of experience. Self-knowledge then has priority, as it were, over propositional knowledge about the world, but self-knowledge is not knowledge about a domain, the psychologized interiority, for example, that the human sciences have brought forth. Again, his concept of swaraj—how one learns to rule oneself—too draws from or rearticulates what he regards as the ethical ideas and practices that structure the tradition of learning. For as he says, learning is first of all learning what is worth knowing:

A student means one who is hungry for learning. Learning is knowledge of what is worth knowing about. The only thing worth knowing about is the atman. True knowledge is thus knowledge of the self. But in order to attain this knowledge, one has to know literature, history, geography, mathematics etc. All these are by way of means...It is not as if men of knowledge without this equipment do not exist within our experience. One who knows this would not go mad after knowledge of letters or of literature and other subjects; he would become mad only after knowledge of the self. He will give up anything which proves an obstacle in the pursuit of this knowledge and dedicate himself only to that which helps him in that pursuit. The student life of one who realizes this never ends and, whether eating, drinking, sleeping, playing, digging, weaving, spinning or doing any other work, he is all the time growing in this knowledge. For this purpose, one has to develop one's faculty of observation. One would not then always need a multitude of teachers or, rather, would look upon the whole world as one's teacher and accept everything in it which is good.<sup>18</sup>

From his reading of the *Gita*, Gandhi formulates an extremely subtle conception of the relationship between—to use contemporary terminology—commitment,<sup>19</sup> action and inquiry/knowledge. Each one is a moment in the other: thus, commitment is the reiteration of the realization that self-knowledge has no objectual or informational dimension, which allows one to use entities (*upadhis*) in the most general sense as sites for executing actions (action without conception) and both the realization and the performance of the action is an inquiry into how sites can be set up or transformed into *sites of learning* (the whole world as teacher).<sup>20</sup>

The integratedness that Gandhi brings to a whole range of domains—family, economy, politics, the natural world—flows from such a conception of knowledge and experience (“What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change” [Gandhi 1997: 66]), and his thinking then has to confront: a) whether the social structures that enabled such an ethical stance of learning is still intact and b) if it is not, how to refashion it, especially in the face of the colonial onslaught, such that the ethical stance and learning can flourish again. It is important to recognize that there is a genuine area of inquiry here that Gandhi was pursuing. Therefore, even if we, as I said before, find Gandhi’s particular conceptions unsatisfactory, it would be both a cognitive and ethical mistake not to pursue that inquiry further. What prevents us from seeing that there is a genuine area of inquiry here is our cognitive enslavement; it blocks out not only areas to be cognized but, tragically, areas that are embodied knowledge or participate in the knowledge element. That in the practical domain, things exist as knowledge, not as knowledge of, is occluded from our experience, thanks to the norming process, which is in large part due to the so-called human sciences.<sup>21</sup> Philosophers often speak of the scientific picture of the world—there’s no such thing. Therefore, the question—entirely rhetorical—how can one live with false theories has no bite in the practice of natural sciences.<sup>22</sup> But it has a bite, surprising though it may seem, in the human sciences. More carefully put, at some point in the history of the West—perhaps this is the beginning of secularization—what matters is not the truth or falsity of theories, but the ability of theories to authorize statements as true and false (this is the importance of Foucault’s insistence on tracking not true utterances—as he puts it—but the authorization of statements as true and false). This is what he means by the emergence of rationalities: norm-generated/norm-generating practices (more accurately, structures or activities); the theoretical drive to interpret practices as governed by norms or truths. In this sense, at the deepest level, we should be able to see truth and norm as one. And this moment (to speak in fictitious terms) undoubtedly coincides in the West with the subjugation or destruction of spirituality/experiential knowledge.

More concretely, in India, it’s the scientism of the human sciences that we suffer from. Scientism, as I have tried to argue, is the result of the process of

secularization which involves transforming the practical domain by finding truth-makers and norm-makers. History and politics, to take the two domains that I briefly discussed, are two examples of truth-making or norm-making. It is not the case that the more explicit moral norms transmitted by religion simply disappear; they too exist but their function and scope changes. The human sciences emerge as instruments of, and oblique reflections, on the process of secularization. History and politics present examples of both truth substituting for norms and truth entwining with norms. In fact, the changing relationship between history and politics is itself instructive in this regard. If during and after the Enlightenment, history began to substitute for politics, for much of the last century, politics has tried to institute the past through history.

Yet, the question of what space Western concepts of politics and history occupy in India remains. Since they cannot quite have the normativity they do in the West, in what way do they reproduce cognitive enslavement? Or is it just the case that the domain of politics, like that of education, has the role functionally to distort or disrupt the reproduction of the sites of ethical transmission? Cognitive enslavement manifests first of all in the way Indians begin to regard “concepts”—the ontologically peculiar entities that begin to be imposed on them—as though they have referents in their practical world. And actions too begin to be seen as embodiment of beliefs. It is through this attitude, or so it seems to me, that colonialism as action endures and reproduces itself. What in it reinforces avidya/ignorance? What in it insulates reflection from experience? Perhaps one area where we might find some kind of answer is in the domain of re-presentation, understood both politically and theoretically. Re-presentation was indeed a novelty for Indians, and it perhaps still is. Indian intellectuals have thought that completing that representation is the way to understand the West, hence themselves, without realizing that that process has covered over or rendered mute their own self-understanding. This is a fraught task: completing that representation without the support or rationality that had driven the Western attempt at re-presentation. The result is that they have neither understood the West nor have they have realized what they have lost; the insulation of reflection from experience is near complete. As a consequence, their life with concepts consists of endless repetition of standard Western “theories” without any development—no development because the norm-driven character of Western reflection is absent here—or an eclectic borrowing of “models” and “values” from Western history/intellectual tradition. That there is no understanding of the West is evident from their refusal or inability to see that the ontologically peculiar entities such as “Hinduism” and “the caste-system” are experiential entities of Westerners/colonizers; and their access to tradition is blocked because they refuse to see that what they take to be tradition is their attempt to complete the Western re-presentation of Indian tradition. They want to set up “the caste-system” so that they can abolish it; they want to continue to “re-form” the Indian traditions so that the fully modern state and institutions can be realized or, in the

critique of modernity version, democracy can be fully realized. The interesting question is why Indian intellectuals did not take the route of showing what was West's understanding, such as it was, of representation? What were its theological roots? Theologically, human beings re-present themselves to themselves by scrutinizing their interiority, their subjectivity in the light of their "understanding" of the Divine perception of human beings. They are again re-presented to God by the mediation of the Son of God in order to be saved. This nested structure of representation informs the domain of politics, but with secularization, the "concept" of representation needs "justification" of the kind we saw secularized morality needed. While that becomes the pre-occupation of Western political theories, in India, "representation" becomes a purely pragmatic game that simply becomes parasitic on the Western representation of India, thereby perpetuating the entities of that representation and occluding the self-understanding of Indians.

I can now return to the question I posed at the beginning. There is indeed a deep integrity to Gandhi's thought which derives from his attempt to preserve the integrity of experience. His answer to why colonialism is unethical and his diagnosis of why the West is violent or unethical too flows from the same source, except that in the case of his remarks about why Western civilization is violent and how its presence in India is destructive of the transmission of ethical learning, we need to flesh out his intuitions with an account of the process of secularization in the West. I have merely offered a crude sketch of what we will need to develop. Such concerns are doubtless alien to Indian social and political theories, given their entrapment in normed domains. *Hind Swaraj* teaches us why these theories have been inhospitable to inquiry. The hope is that by having access to a thinking that recognized, and then found ways to remove, the insulation between reflection and experience, we can begin fresh inquiries into what we have made of our life with concepts. Such inquiries would delve into the kind of learning processes that reproduce themselves in the social and cognitive surrounds obtaining today and investigate whether or not these learning processes have the potential to create the conditions for the pursuit of ethical learning and self-knowledge—*swaraj*—to flourish unhindered.

## Notes

- 1 Letter to Esther Menon, 13-4-1932 (Gandhi, 2001, 55: 233). Reference to Gandhi's collected work (2001) will be given by volume followed by page numbers.
- 2 The phrase "cognitive enslavement" is taken from Akeel Bilgrami's essay "Gandhi, the Philosopher" (Bilgrami, 2003), though I develop it in my own way.
- 3 In his "Letter to Mrs. Maddock," dated 14 March 1924, Gandhi (2001, 23: 55) explicitly contrasts the ancient culture of India based on non-violence, which he says must be saved from its "impending destruction by modern, that is, Western culture." The latter, according to him, is based upon "violence."
- 4 Jonathan Lear in his *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (2000) explores this issue in a subtle way. However, Lear thinks that Aristotle's conception of happiness is an 'enigmatic signifier,' the introduction of which brings 'incompleteness'

and ‘anxiety’ into people’s lives. As we shall see later, if this were true, it would mean that intellectual traditions of India and of ancient Greece and Rome were pursuing something chimerical.

- 5 His remark on history is especially illuminating in this regard: “History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul” (Gandhi, 1997: 56). In what follows, I will be explicating what he calls “force of love or of the soul” or *atman*.
- 6 For a more explicit statement, see his important article ‘Neither a Saint nor a Politician,’ in *Young India*, dated 12 May 1920 (Gandhi, 2001, 20: 304).
- 7 Hence, his remark: ‘Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarrelling?’ (Gandhi, 1997: 53).
- 8 We are familiar with one kind of scientism, the one which draws on the natural sciences to offer a picture, a description, or even a theory of problems and phenomena that the natural sciences themselves would not even dream of as falling within their ambit (e.g., the problem of consciousness and of intentionality). There is another kind of scientism which has not been recognized, namely, scientism of the human sciences. Why has this gone unrecognized? Among the many reasons, one has to do with the peculiarity or more precisely the asymmetry between the two scientisms. Unlike in the case of the familiar kind of scientism, this scientism is not an illegitimate extension from a legitimate field of inquiry; the so-called human sciences are themselves creators and carriers of scientism. It is the scientism of the human sciences that, in my reading, Foucault was struggling to bring to light. See the last section of the chapter.
- 9 This is one of the reasons it is appropriate to talk of the scientism of the human sciences.
- 10 Some of these characteristics are noticeable on the cultural left and they perhaps also explain why people located in it often tend to behave like militants in an imaginary party (to borrow Sartre’s vivid description of Camus).
- 11 See letter to Maganlal Gandhi, dated 25 July 1918 (Gandhi, 2001, 17: 150).
- 12 Foucault very perspicuously notes that in European history, the opposition is not between science and spirituality but between religion and spirituality. As we will see later (and in Chapter 5), it’s not surprising then that the secularization of religious structures become inhospitable or hostile to spiritual knowledge (2005: 251).
- 13 This is a wonderfully precise elaboration of Nietzsche’s genealogy of the paradox of morality I discussed in Chapter 1. Foucault himself does not see his work as describing the secularization of European culture. But it has been my contention for a while that we see Foucault’s later work as tracking the effects of secularization in very different domains of European culture. Although Foucault’s work gets hold of the strange creature ‘normativity,’ he is unable to see its relationship to religion, essentially because he has no theory of religion (see the discussion in Chapter 5). Charles Taylor’s mammoth work (Taylor, 2007) on secularization becomes a tedious retelling of familiar intellectual history of Europe, because of his minimalist attempt to understand religion in terms of the transcendent/immanent distinction. This minimalist attempt, which he calls ‘prudent (cowardly)’ (p. 15)—strange and revealing choice of adverbs for a cognitive enterprise!—is deeply problematic because the distinction is internal to specifically Catholic theology. However, Taylor shows no awareness of the theoretical incoherence of employing theology to study religion! We are, in short, asked to accept the self-description of religion! On this, in some ways the most difficult question of how to study religion, see Balagangadhara (1994: 242-62). Expectedly, there is no reference to this work in Taylor’s book: how can a heathen teach what religion and secularization is to a European (I mean this in broader sense which would include North America) and a practicing Catholic to boot!

- 14 Indeed, the bullshitter, who has figured prominently in Bilgrami's essay (cited in note 2), is precisely the one who believes in and seeks such "norms" and "truths." The politically correct person is a bullshitter in this sense. He is a collection of truths/norms; what he avoids is inquiry. One can see why Gandhi emphasized the *vrat of aparigraha* or non-possession: collection of 'truths' as much as collection of things is a form of *avidya* or ignorance. See his discussion of Ashram Observances, especially *aparigraha* or non-possession (2001, 56: 142ff).
- 15 What I mean is that we cannot simply take up, say, Khadi or Charka as a practice, as Gandhians thought they had to. We need his understanding, not the particular way he used those entities or *upadhis* to execute his actions. As regards "the caste-system," though he used the orientalist term, he was clearly not defending the normed domain represented by orientalist/colonial discourse. It is therefore puzzling why Bilgrami fails to appreciate that the practical domain Gandhi was seeking to reclaim, as part of his attempt to preserve the integrity of experience, is not the normed domain, though Gandhi uses the orientalist phrase. The integrity argument *would require* that we provide an understanding of what Gandhi is defending when he defends "the caste-system." Clearly, he is not defending the view of it that Bilgrami himself has as "the most resilient form of exclusionary social egalitarianism in the history of the world." Ironically, in the Austin-Hare story Bilgrami narrates to foreground the Gandhian ethics as a wholesale alternative to Western morality conceived as principles, Bilgrami has the resource to provide such an understanding (whether or not he wishes to undertake it). In his words: "Austin was being merely deflationary in denying that an act of conscience had to have a principle underlying it. Gandhi erects the denial into a radical alternative to a (western) tradition of moral thinking." (Bilgrami, 2003: 4162). It seems to me that Bilgrami plays Hare to Gandhi's Austin when he refuses to extend this "radical alternative" to how Gandhi viewed the practical domain, which the orientalists moralized as "the caste-system." My template of normativity, constructed in Chapter 1, goes some way toward showing what Gandhi was trying to get hold of. Bilgrami goes on to say that "the most alarming aspects of religious intolerance is preferable to it [the caste-system]." The epistemology of intolerance, consequently the violence that follows from it, is, as we saw in the last chapter, intrinsic to the dynamic of religion. It hardly allows one to separate the "attractive" picture of the intolerant person as someone caring enough about truth to wanting to share it with others from the force and violence involved in making others share it!
- 16 "At the present moment, though I am reading many things, *Bhagavad Gita* is becoming more and more the only infallible guide, the only dictionary of reference, in which I find all the sorrows, all the troubles, all the trials arranged in the alphabetical order with exquisite solutions.... That book is not a historical record, but it is the record of the concrete experience of its author, whether it was really Vyasa or not I am not concerned. And if it is a record of anybody's experience, it must not be beyond us to be able to test the truth of it by repeating the experience. I am testing the truth almost everyday in my life and find it never failing. This of course does not mean that I have reached the state described, for instance, at the end of the Second Chapter. But I know that the more we carry out the prescription given to it, the nearer do we answer the description given of the perfect state" (Gandhi, 2001, 39: 450).
- 17 I have deliberately refrained from defining "experience," letting the concept acquire its range as the argument unfolds. It would not in any case help matters at this stage if I were to say that I am using it to explicate Gandhi's remarks, almost always left unelaborated, on *atman*, *sat*, and *satyagraha*. However, let me note here that I use the word as a translation of *anubhava*—which literally means

in accord with or after (*anu-*) happening (*bhava*). In many of the intellectual traditions in India, self-knowledge is passage from *anu-bhava* to *anu-bhaava*, achieved through reflection/action/commitment.

- 18 For his illuminating remarks about non-objectual nature of self-knowledge, see Gandhi's "Letter to Students" (2001, 19: 199–200; 55: 310–11 and 333–34).
- 19 The meaning of the root *bhaj* is appropriately captured as 'commitment.'
- 20 "The true meaning of *bhakti* is search for the *atman*. When the *atman* realizes itself, *bhakti* is transformed into *jnana*." See Gandhi's "Letter to Jamnadas Gandhi," dated 2 February 1913 (2001, 13: 191).
- 21 See the concluding chapter. The point involved is a difficult and subtle one, which requires the conceptual clarifications of the idea of the practical/experiential that is undertaken in the previous chapters for it to be fully appreciated.
- 22 Bas C. Van Fraassen, in his *The Empirical Stance* (2002, 63), points out that in the human sciences, concepts refuse to go away even when the theories that developed them die out, testifying thereby to the scientistic character of the human sciences.

### 3 Framing the Predicament of Indian Thought

#### Gandhi, *the Gita*, and Action

I have something far more powerful than argument, namely, experience.<sup>1</sup>  
—M.K. Gandhi

Although there is such a thing as Indian thought, it seems to play no role in the way social sciences and philosophy are practiced in India or elsewhere. The problem is not only that we no longer employ terms such as *atman*, *avidya*, *dharma* to reflect on our experience, the terms that we do indeed use—sovereignty, secularism, rights, civil society and political society, corruption—seem to insulate our experience from our reflection. Drawing on the interpretation of Gandhi's thought developed in Chapter 2, I will formulate how Gandhi addressed the predicament. I will then discuss three very different examples taken from our peculiar life with concepts that will also serve to clarify and illustrate the framework I am outlining. I will then very briefly discuss how Gandhi saw the *Gita* as showing him a way out of the predicament.

#### Frames and Predicament

Why speak of a predicament? Although I have been speaking grandly of Indian thought, let's focus for a moment on the by now more than a century-old career of Indian philosophy in global academia. Out of the enormous scholarly output of translation, interpretation, historical reconstruction, it is difficult to name one work that actually uses the resources of Indian intellectual traditions to produce a work of philosophy, a piece of thinking about any aspect of the world or life. So, *dharma*, *satya*, *avidya*, or *upadhi* have only been receiving philological attention rather than being employed in thinking: the translation problem they create then seems less urgent conceptually, though important enough from the point of view of accuracy or adequacy. This situation would not have merited the characterization of being a predicament had it not been for the fact that Indian thought is not quite like Aristotle's science.<sup>2</sup> It is not dead yet. It lives on in some fashion (in what condition and vigor and so on are not pertinent at the moment), and there

have been attempts, as we shall see with Gandhi, to think with its concepts. There seems to be little connection, however, between the academic enterprise of philosophy and the living stream of Indian thought. Am I contrasting the dead academic philosophy with the living stream in the outside world? The contrast is there to be drawn, especially if we take the creative engagement with tradition that Gandhi, a non-philosopher, achieves and compare it with the dull exegesis and commentary piled up by the philosophers. But it would be misleading to formulate the contrast this way, as an opposition between these two worlds. We will then fail to notice the more general predicament and the deeper explanatory demand it makes on us. It is partly for this reason that I have been talking about Indian thought since we are concerned with our life with concepts. One might take the line that the problem is one of translation since many of the terms we listed above are very much present and even used in our languages; it's their translation into English (and other European languages) that creates the problem. Although there is indeed a problem of translation, the linguistic problem of translation does not capture the predicament that Indian thought finds itself in. My own preference is to see the translation problem that arises in the case of Indian thought as symptomatic of a deeper problem that needs a different kind of framing than as a problem of translation/interpretation with which we are familiar, whether we take that problem as formulated in analytical philosophy or in continental thought. In saying this, I am of course acknowledging that a proper framing of the predicament is the issue at hand and that will be the focus of this chapter.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* had given us a vivid portrayal of this predicament (Gandhi, 1997: 46–71). That portrayal still captures our situation, even though hundred years have passed since Gandhi wrote that text. This chapter can be seen as an attempt to restate, in terms we can (I hope) readily relate to, Gandhi's diagnosis of the predicament so as to better understand his claim that the *Gita* helped him find a way out. The primary concern, however, will be to arrive at a proper framing of the predicament; any productive discussion of the way out can only take place when we begin to diagnose the predicament. My strategy in this chapter will be as follows: I will first outline in my language Gandhi's framing of our predicament in *Hind Swaraj*. I will then discuss three very different examples taken from our peculiar life with concepts that will also serve to clarify and illustrate the framework I am outlining. I will then very briefly discuss how Gandhi saw the *Gita* as showing him a way out of the predicament.

*Hind Swaraj* is concerned with the particular kind of enslavement that colonialism had brought about and which was wrecking the intricate structures of the practical life evolved over a very long period of time. The enslavement of Indians had a peculiar epistemic character: it taught them to ignore the kind of knowledge that organized the domains of practical life. Law, medicine, history, nationalism, the state brings in a way of looking and certain conceptualizations that begin to cleave reflections from the form of practical life in which they are embedded. Thus, health, to take an example

dear to Gandhi, no longer functions as a matrix of practical action, related integrally and reflectively to ends that inform not only that matrix but other adjacent matrices (or possible new ones that can be fashioned). In any case, health is not the state of my bare body. Law is not a resource that helps me resolve my conflictual relationships in my familial matrix or in the domain of business in a reflective way but an instrument that creates new disputes which I can only deal with in its terms which extrudes reflection. History brings in a perspective that begins to distort my relationship to the *kavya*, *purana*, and *itihasa* by transforming their function in the practical form of life. Similar considerations apply not only to nationalism and to the politics centered around the state but to many more entities and conceptualization that colonialism brought in. So, let me speak of a quasi-cognitive/evaluative<sup>3</sup> frame which as it were houses these entities; enslavement to them distorts and devalues and even veils the domain of practical knowledge, which I will term the actional frame. Gandhi's concern was to restore the integrity of this frame through learning to reflect on practical life again. So, the *ashram* life he began to construct around action-theoretic concepts modeled on *yama* and *niyama*—such as *aparigraha* and *ahimsa*—sought to grasp the function of the form of life that was being attacked by the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame. This point needs to be underlined since this ethical/practical activity should not be seen as an attempt to recreate practices from the past.

Although Gandhi did not articulate his philosophy in a systematic way, his thought sought to combine three elements: engagement with Indian traditions, creation of new concepts, and social understanding. It is remarkable, then, that not a trace of Gandhian perspective can be found either in the self-understanding of our institutions or in the social scientific discourse on our social world. When he figures, he does so either as a saint or as a charismatic mass-mobilizer with quaint, anti-modern, and clearly unviable ideas. But *Hind Swaraj* had made clear why his perspective would not find a place in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame through which India is being looked at. In fashioning his resistance to colonialism and the frame that was enslaving Indians, Gandhi realized that the traditions of experiential knowledge (*adhyatma*) in India have been damaged. He clearly understood that the transmission of ethical learning has been obstructed, driven underground, and distorted. He was expressing this realization when he argued in *Hind Swaraj* that India has become “irreligious” (by religion he meant the inquiry that for him underlies all traditions and which for him was exemplified in *adhyatmic* thought). It was the actional frame of ethical actions that was being muted by the dominance of the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame.<sup>4</sup> Gandhi saw his task as strengthening the actional frame, which involved reinvigorating its own reflective dimension. I shall return to consider Gandhi's creative engagement with tradition through *the Gita* in the last section. Before that, I offer some illustrations of our life with concepts, to show how general the predicament happens to be. For it is not confined to the practice of Indian philosophy. And unless we diagnose the reason for the generalized predicament, we will neither

understand why philosophy shares in that predicament nor whether philosophy can help itself and us to come to grips with it.

### **Are We Corrupt?**

Intellectuals, especially philosophers, usually think of themselves as more susceptible to various kinds of conceptual bewitchments or confusions. Gandhi too thought that it is the elite who were enslaved. The discourse of “corruption,” however, demonstrates that it is not the intellectuals alone who share this epistemic condition. Practically, everyone seems to think that “corruption” is rampant in India, or even that we are all “corrupt.” The puzzle, though, is this: whether we take the phenomenon or the moral judgment, there is nothing obvious about corruption. In fact, just a moment’s reflection on the standard utterances, which rarely varies, we hear all round us—from scholars to journalists to politicians to ordinary Indians—will make this clear. It is “ubiquitous,” “all pervasive,” “the rot,” so goes the rant by some morally upright figure, “has set in deep,” and so forth. Even if we assume that this can be made sense of, a very hard assumption to make, the conclusion or, at any rate, the implication turns out to be the opposite of what the discourse set out to observe and condemn: that there is indeed a logic, a pattern, and systematicity to the actions and the practices they are embedded in. Our first task has to be the cognitive one of spelling out that logic, that frame of action, not the moral one of condemning it without understanding. We want rich, clear, and non-*ad hoc* explanation of patterns of action that by all accounts have such systematicity and ubiquity. Let me admit that it is not an easy point to grasp, but unless we do so, we will continue the tirade without even realizing where that moralizing stance comes from. What creates the difficulty is that the two frames we mentioned above are in operation (socially rather than merely cognitively). One of them is actionally effective but otherwise unacknowledged and the other one cognitively/morally/legally operant and officially or publicly legitimate.

What happens when the left or liberal intellectual sits in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative framework and writes about nepotistic and other corrupt practices that supposedly pervade Indian culture? It is doubtful if any cognition happens. Certain ways of speaking or writing are adopted, which marks one out as a scholar or an intellectual. One of our most distinguished economists once illustrated the lack of certain values among the poorer and illiterate section of Indians with a report of an interview with a woman, a poor laborer, who, when asked about *her* well-being, replied that “*we* are not well” (and she wasn’t using the royal *we*) because there was much illness in her family. Assuming that this is a factually correct report, one would have thought that the woman’s response reveals an ethical universe understanding which might be richly instructive for social scientists. Instead, her answer is supposed to show that she doesn’t understand “freedom” and “choice” and such exalted values. As one of Kannada’s most sensitive literary scholars

Kirtinath Kurtakoti once pointed out (Kurtakoti, 2006), when intellectuals use “feudal” to characterize certain behavior, attitude, and values, they are using it as a term of condemnation rather than understanding, for the experience is ours, but the understanding is someone else’s. He was skeptical that we can arrive at genuine understanding this way. The point is generalizable: when we use the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame for our putative “observation” (in much of social scientific writing or journalistic reportage), very little cognition or understanding takes place. Instead, we “observe” inefficiency, venality, nepotism, lack of decision-making ability, and so on. All actions thus appear as violation of rationality and morality.

We are now in a position to appreciate a remarkable feature of the word “corruption” that is playing such a crucial role in our lives. That word is not a translation of a native or vernacular word, which should have been the case if the two frames overlapped even significantly if not fully. And whatever word functions as a translation of “corruption”—in Kannada, and perhaps in many other Indian languages, it is “*bhrashtachar*”—simply has to depend on the original to import the right (whatever that is) connotation and evaluative force. (*Brashta* is someone who departs from the path of *dharma*, and *achara* is practice. I doubt that this term has any currency; I suspect people simply use “corruption.”) So, we do not employ it to understand something, here actions of a certain kind, but *deploy* it to classify and judge acts. Since there is no understanding, the deployment appears quite arbitrary. Let me make clear this idea of deployment of discourse with another familiar example. Take “Hinduism.” It is not difficult to show that this term has no referent despite the fact that it has been deployed to refer to any number of things, it being entirely indeterminate what can be included in it. Though we can understand why it was postulated into existence (because, roughly, Europeans could only make sense of the diverse practices they saw by drawing them together into a religion called “Hinduism”), it is clear that it cannot provide any understanding or experiential salience to Indians. That the discourse of “Hinduism” is now being deployed by Indians themselves does not make the entity come into being but creates situations that can range from the harmless, if a little awkward (say Gandhi’s use of it), to the positively disastrous, say its use in politics. But one or the other, it eventually does have the effect of masking the experience of Indians when they wittingly or unwittingly deploy it. Corruption too was a non-empirical observation/judgment of the Indian transactions by the Westerners (in fact, most of Asia that they came into contact was thought to be corrupt). The domain it covered and sought to attack was the whole social ethical world (what I have been calling the actional frame). Like in the case of “Hinduism,” when Indians begin to deploy the “corruption” discourse, the consequences range from the harmlessly ridiculous to the dangerously corrosive. The deployment of this frame and the way of speaking that goes with it has such a grip on us now that it begins to obfuscate whatever implicit understanding we might have had of our own ethical universe and the frame that is operative there. When we

deploy the discourse of “corruption,” we exempt ourselves from understanding the actions that we want to classify or judge as “corrupt.”

The obfuscation or destruction of the reflective universe of this frame should not be understood sectorially (modern versus traditional). It is perfectly possible for the items of the so-called tradition to be deployed, that is appear in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame in which “corruption” “rights” or the language of democracy operate. Let us take seriously the idea that understanding actions in any deep sense itself involves ends; but these are not subjective ends. Although the actional frame is still operative, the reflection on ends of action and experience that was part of that frame has become fractured, indistinct, and its transmission sporadic, in part because of the onslaught from the other frame. So, when we look at a whole range of actions—the lineman who demands money to fix the phone for which he gets paid, the minister who demands money to grant license, the professor who uses his connections to get his son a job, the bureaucrat who demands a trip abroad to clear collaboration, the powerful family that expects that its progenies will, as a matter of course, occupy the most powerful elected office of the land—in one frame, they all get classified as “corrupt.” But in the other frame, our evaluations of some of the cases above may be totally different. For example, although most of us would want to make critical remarks about the hold of the Gandhi family, a large number—sometimes the very same people—would also regard Rahul Gandhi as having a privileged claim to the prime ministerial chair. And some instead of regarding the professor’s act as nepotism, may consider it as laudable, an act that possibly saved the department. What I am straining to get at is that even when we are deploying “corruption” to condemn certain actions, there is, at least in some cases, almost simultaneously a different understanding which may get displayed in the action we take but not register in our discourse.

If the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame has fractured, suppressed, and rendered silent the actional frame or universe, in another way, the force of the latter has appropriated for itself some of the structures, the institutions, the language that belong in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame. The complication that results from this awaits even an initial description let alone a theorization. Our next example will, however, show why when we take to theorizing, the state of affairs I just described does not even appear as a problem requiring conceptualization.

### **Our Sovereignty and Our Civil/Political Society?**

In this section, I want to highlight the special problem posed by terms that we have come to regard as theoretical or social scientific. The “forms of experience,” as Foucault would put it (Foucault, 1984, 1985), that provide the unity and identity of something called the West cannot be fully understood if we do not regard the so-called human sciences as part of that experience even as they are a reflection (in a sense that we still need to understand) on that

experience. To start with, let us take a very familiar political concept, namely “sovereignty.” Emerging sometime in the 12th century (Berman, 1983), sovereignty encapsulates the problem of arbitrating the jurisdiction or the dominion of the Pope and the King, of sacred and temporal/secular rule. Although many ideas of the Greek or more specifically Aristotelian political theory found their way into the discourse of sovereignty—body politic, the source of the government in nature and reason—it is important to note how drastically they were transformed by theology. Thus, nature becomes the instrument of divine Will, reason the means of providing divine revelation, the body politic gets split into the body of the church and the body of the secular polity and gives rise to the problem of which of the two is the true representative of the spiritual body of Christ. The series of questions this theological discourse raises—how God manifests himself in two spheres or communities (the sacred and the temporal) and how a Christian can live in these two communities simultaneously—is completely alien to Greek thought. The discourse of sovereignty thus begins a story that takes in the state, the nation, citizenship, civil society, and secularism as it encounters new political and social problems during the course of a history that is still unfolding. Historiography gets forged to narrate and re-narrate this discourse and thus becomes both a part of politics as we now come to understand the term and a continuation of the discourse of sovereignty itself. Let me take advantage of the limitation of space and make a large claim: concepts, such as citizenship and civil society, or entities, such as race and nation, which are part of the discourse of sovereignty are not intelligible discretely; indeed, they are constitutive of the forms of experience from which they only seem to stand apart or above. The disciplinization, as it were, of this discourse of sovereignty has a lot to do with why concepts and “theories” of, say, citizenship or secularism, appear to stand a part or above, available as theoretical resources elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Now, thanks to colonization, this discourse of sovereignty is deployed in non-Western cultures and histories. In India, for example, we are all too familiar with citizenship, civil society, secularism, and rights. We—that is, the non-Westerners deploying the discourse of sovereignty—should not, however, mistake familiarity for intelligibility. I would like to illustrate and elaborate this point by taking up Partha Chatterjee’s attempt to theorize “civil society/political society” in the Indian context (Chatterjee, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2004).

How should we mourn our dead? Should this be in the traditional Indian way or should we adopt Western model of condolence—public meeting, eulogy, etc.? Commenting on this controversy between Rabindranath Tagore and Nabinchandra Sen, Chatterjee asks:

Does modernity require the universal adoption of Western forms of civil society? If those specific forms have been, in fact, built around a secularized version of Western Christianity, then must they be imitated

in a modernized non-Christian world? Are the normative principles on which civil social institutions in the modern West are based so culturally particular that they can be abandoned in a non-Western version of modernity?

(Chatterjee, 2000: 40)

Chatterjee's formulation raises the problem of familiarity and intelligibility that I mentioned above. Read in a familiar way, the formulation seems to be raising some valid and even significant issues. Thus, when Chatterjee proceeds to designate the "elite" (in the older terminology) as belonging to "civil society," ["Civil society, then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents—in countries like India—the high ground of modernity" (Chatterjee, 2001: 10)], he seems to be saying something significant. But is he? What has mourning got to do with civil society or, for that matter, with political theory? What does it mean to say, as we so often do, that forms of civil society—the institutions, concepts, practices—are secularized versions of Western Christianity? Is there a theory—Western or non-Western—that tells us what secularization involves? And what do we mean by "normative" principles? What makes concepts such as citizenship, civil society, secularism, normative? Do we really understand the normativity of these concepts? At the slightest probing, the familiar turns out to be unintelligible. Before returning to these questions, let us take a closer look at both "civil society" and "political society" as Chatterjee wants to set them up.

Chatterjee explicitly says that he is using "civil society" in the sense it was used in the Hegelian/Marxian tradition. However, anyone with the most cursory knowledge of Western political theory will see that from Locke through Marx, "civil society" was not used to designate a section of society. In Locke, everyone who exited the state of nature belonged to civil society and thereby formed a compact or contract which provided the normative basis for either endorsing or rejecting any political association. In Hegel, this abstract, philosophical concept becomes dialectical—that is, history itself gets permeated by the ideality/normativity of philosophy, so that we, which includes everyone, become reconciled with our social/political world. The early Marx recognized this move for what it is: politics as theology. That is why his trenchant criticism of the duality of citizen and man, political society and civil society, a duality which he thinks cannot be overcome without abolishing the whole framework (Marx, 1975: 220). In fact, this early essay of Marx is really the first serious attempt to show the normativity of concepts "civil society" and "political society" that otherwise appear purely referential. Whatever one might think of these moves, they clearly do not involve using "civil society" and "political society" to designate a section of the society.

Having set up "civil society" to refer to the cultural elite of India, Chatterjee uses "political society" to refer to those sections of the society, the "population," which he says are the target of governmentality. On the one hand then, there is the "culturally equipped" citizens who are the subjects of theory; on

the other hand, the population which leads an illegal or a paralegal existence which is the object of policy. Political society is meant to capture the “site of negotiation and contestation opened up by the activities of the governmental agencies aimed at population groups” and the latter acts by appealing to the “ties of moral solidarity” (Chatterjee, 2004: 74) Our question is: what is Chatterjee doing in using what he calls the terms of classical political theory to designate two sectors or spaces? At one level, he is simply redescribing what the subalterns used to call “elite politics” and “subaltern” politics. What does such a redescription achieve? Does it help us understand our present, the character of our institutions and practices and the concepts that inform them? Since neither “moral ties” nor “illegality” or “paralegality” is specific to the sector that Chatterjee calls “political society,” the distinction seems hard to justify theoretically.<sup>6</sup> It would seem then that rather than offering a new political theory for the “subaltern,” Chatterjee’s theorization might well be attesting to the subalternity of Indian political theory! The concepts of classical political theory seem to appear at best simply as terms with no theoretical content.

That Chatterjee’s uses of “civil society” and “political society” have very little to do with the way they were used in Western political theory may be conceded. One might, however, argue that Chatterjee’s misuse or misinterpretation testifies to the strange and new career of these Western concepts in non-Western cultures and that what at first appears as a radical misinterpretation or misapplication is indeed an attempt to theorize that career. In the same way as Greek political concepts were transformed beyond recognition by Christian Europe, the concepts of secularized Christianity too undergo radical transformation in a non-Western culture like India. I believe this argument is essentially right; but far from helping Chatterjee’s case, it shows both the urgency and the enormity of the task of coming to terms with the fact that the so-called human sciences are part of West’s self-understanding, part of the dynamic of secularization. There’s nothing scientific or theoretical about them. Let’s reflect for a moment on the transformation of the Greek concepts: the forms of experience that took centuries to crystallize—the Christianization of Europe and its secularization—involved a new conception of the self, the shaping of experience in terms of morality (as Nietzsche never tired of pointing out), the emergence of entities such as “sexuality” (as Foucault began to show us in his later work), political institutions and concepts that cannot be separated from the new conception of the self, and the norming of experience. Thanks to the work of Foucault (1985), Balagangadhara (1994), MacMullen (1997), we are only beginning to glimpse how we might map this transformation. Consider now the even more daunting task of understanding what happens to Western concepts and institutions when they enter a culture whose forms of experience we have not even begun to conceptualize.

The attempt like Chatterjee’s, then, commits a double error: it first takes as intelligible the concepts that are part of the forms of experience that constitute the identity of the West; it then finds “useful” to apply those concepts to

understand the present of a culture whose forms of experience could not have been constituted by those concepts. Unless one makes the drastic and unjustified assumption that forms of experiences are the same everywhere (or that colonialism has made it so—but this would be unacceptable to the subalterns given their characterization of colonial rule as dominance without hegemony), Chatterjee's kind of attempt cannot avoid committing the double error. It is ironic that Chatterjee uses Foucault's governmentality thesis to characterize his “political society.” In Foucault, governmentality refers to the process in early modern Europe of norming the state, and his interest in this process of norming is of a piece with his interest in the process of norming that created “sexuality.” His concern is to study the “historicity of forms of experience” (Foucault, 1984: 334). Let us note that Foucault explicitly says that “Rather than embrace the distinction between the State and civil society as an historical and political universal which could guide the questioning of all concrete systems of government, one can attempt to see a form of schematization proper to the particular technology of government” (Foucault, 2008: 319). Such a study can help us in avoiding the double error, since it contributes to the alternative account we must give of the role of the “human sciences” (including that of the discourse of sovereignty) in the constitution of the European experience (Foucault, 2003). Such an account is the theoretical precondition, as it were, for undertaking a theorization of our present.

### **Our Moral Dilemmas**

My last example happens to be from philosophy proper and conveniently involves the *Gita*, thus providing an instructive contrast to my treatment of Gandhi's engagement with the *Gita* in the next section. I have in mind Matilal's essay on moral dilemmas (Matilal, 2002). Matilal wants to argue that Arjuna in the *Gita* is confronted with a moral dilemma. There is, of course, a usage of the word dilemma, and especially moral dilemma, to refer to any difficult situation in which it is hard to know how to act (morally). It is clear Matilal is not using the word in that loose, everyday sense (for then, his essay would have no significance). So, what is a moral dilemma? The difficulty is not with providing (or borrowing) a definition from the recently burgeoning literature on moral dilemmas. What we need to note is that we do not have an intuitive understanding of what might be a moral dilemma, in the way that we can intuitively grasp what a logical or semantical paradox is when we see an example even if we are not logicians. Matilal's own formulation of moral dilemma as “a species of action-guide dilemma” is rather vague. Here is what he says:

What is an action-guide dilemma (religious or moral)? A dilemma can be defined here, perhaps, in terms of obligation and evaluation principles. An action-guide dilemma arises in a situation just in case an agent cannot do everything that is obligatory for him to do in that situation. He feels obliged to do, say, both X and Y; but it is impossible to do both

of them. For the situation is such that doing X would be undoing Y, and vice versa. You cannot cook your goose and have it alive at the same time. This is that kind of a situation.

(Matilal, 2002: 6)

Why do obligations create moral dilemmas? What is morality such that it forces you to experience your obligations as a dilemma? Matilal's remark "doing X would be undoing [not doing?] Y" suggests that he doesn't quite grasp the assumptions one has to make in order to understand moral dilemma. Meeting one moral requirement or obligation prevents one from meeting another moral obligation. And that failure violates a moral norm, that is, makes one immoral. Let me confess here that while it is not difficult to formally understand what constitutes a moral dilemma, I simply cannot grasp it experientially. Nor can I really understand the issues debated by those who argue that moral theories ought not to give rise to moral dilemmas and those who argue that moral dilemmas are inescapable. Aquinas famously held that Christian moral theory cannot allow moral dilemmas to arise, and if moral dilemmas do arise for an agent, it can only be because of some prior moral violation on his part. Another, more explicitly theological response could be that it is only in this defective earthly world that one encounters moral dilemmas; in a deontologically perfect world, one will never encounter moral dilemmas. The trouble is that the examples presented in the literature do not make a compelling case: they either offer trivial cases, unconvincing cooked up scenarios, or extreme situations (*Sophie's Choice*, for example) or cases taken from literature (*Antigone*, Agamemnon, and now Arjuna) where it is far from clear that the characters experience the situation as dilemmatic.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the first chapter in the *Gita* gives no evidence that Arjuna is paralyzed by a dilemma and Matilal fails to show (even informally) how Arjuna is confronted with a dilemma. I am not suggesting that formally it cannot be done, but only that doing so would require importing into the universe of the *Gita* kinds of consideration and language that do not belong there. Why engage in such an enterprise, which advances neither our understanding of why the dilemmatic structure has acquired such salience in the secularized moral theories of the West nor throws light on how we are to read the *Gita*. In fact, we have here a clue to the sterility of contemporary Indian philosophy and social scientific theorizing: a problematic, in this case, moral dilemma, that appears to engage Western intellectuals is taken over without any effort to understand what the problem is, why it appears as a problem, and then superimposed on a material that is not even superficially treating the same problem.

It may seem that both the second and the third examples have a feature that is distinct from the first example: they do not appear to take concepts or problems that lie in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame. This is only true to the extent that, unlike "corruption," neither the pair of concepts in the second example—civil and political society—nor the problem in the third were used by the colonizers to characterize their experience of Indian culture. With "corruption," there is enslavement to the way India was experienced, whereas

“civil/political society” or “moral dilemma” was not so used, even though they figure in West’s self-understanding. That is correct, but what is significant is that they track the frame: with these supposedly new concepts drawn from the West, it is as though the theorists are seeking normative salience vicariously. They are misunderstanding the role of such normative concepts in the secularizing dynamic of Western culture. In the recent movement against “corruption,” the massive deployment of the discourse of corruption indexes the extent to which the actional frame has been deprived of its language of reflection. Anna Hazare, coming as he does from that universe, stands in for that language though he cannot speak it, overwhelmed as he is by the discourse of corruption. What Chatterjee, as theorist standing in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame, notices is the fractured actional frame (what he prefers to call illegality is really deep down a stripping down of that realm). But he wants to give it normative significance, hence the resort to civil/political society vocabulary. It is as though theorization involves tracking the normative slots and filling them with “agency”—the proletariat, the woman, the Dalit, the subaltern....<sup>8</sup>

So far, I have been saying that the concepts of Western theory have essential relationship with specific forms of experience and are, therefore, part of a single history; those concepts both constitute and norm that experience as it has come to be lived and understood. When they appear in our midst, they must be treated as unconceptualized concepts and not as concepts that tell us how we live or ought to live. In the end, in the same way as “corruption” masks our experience, the deployment of “civil/political society” will in effect block any attempt to conceptualize the unconceptualized concepts in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame. This is no mere word play; rather, that is how we can understand whether and how the frame inheres in the entities or items that it houses: only by reconceptualizing them or by removing those items that rightfully belong in the actional frame but which have been deployed in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame.<sup>9</sup> The *Gita*, for example.

### Gandhi and the *Gita*

When Gandhi encountered the *Gita*, in England and through Edwin Arnold’s translation, it was firmly placed in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame. His realization that that frame enslaves one to a perspective in which our experiential world appears as defective, stagnant, and degraded, and that the items that get placed there—stories or temples—appear opaque, was achieved through his understanding of the *Gita*. He learnt from the *Gita* how to move it out of the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame.

I have something far more powerful than argument, namely, experience. As far back as 1889, when I had my first contact with the *Gita*, it gave me a hint of *satyagraha* and, as I read it more and more, the hint developed into a full revelation of *satyagraha*. That a man of Krishna’s intelligence should indulge in all this wisdom of the *Gita* for the benefit

of an Arjuna in flesh and blood, would be like killing the buffalo for a leather-strap. To believe he did so is to tarnish his name, if it is true that he was the Supreme God, and to do injustice to Arjuna if he was a warrior of experience and judgment. I know you will not dismiss these ideas off-hand. I would rather you embraced and developed them. You will readily admit, I am sure, that learned commentaries are of much less value than the experience of one's limited intelligence.

(Gandhi, 2001, 18: 52)

He was able to do that to the *Gita* because the *Gita* enabled him to remove structures that were occluding experience. So, in formulating his idea of *satyagraha*, Gandhi was rediscovering the central insight of Indian thought, namely how to remove *adhyasa*. But what is *satyagraha*? How do you stand in *satya* to make your *agraha*? This he says the *Gita* teaches him when it instructs us not to be attached to the fruits of one's action. How do we understand this? Despite its familiarity, it is far from self-evident how one carries out that instruction. The fact that it has acquired a pious, moral (almost Kantian) tone has not helped. Gandhi realized that the *Gita* is a sustained meditation on the nature of action. Since it "records," as Gandhi puts it, somebody's experience, "it must not be beyond us to be able to test the truth of it by repeating the experience. I am testing the truth almost every day in my life and find it never failing" (Gandhi 2001, 38: 449–50).

To execute an action in the experiential space is a cognitive act. What it teaches is that action when tied to subjective ends tend to increase both unhappiness and ignorance. It is only when one learns how action is carried out within a matrix that one makes discoveries about ends that implicitly organize the matrices. Let me term the process and the result a practice. To restore a reflective dimension to the hollowed out actional frame is to learn to elaborate matrices, to perform action without conception. Thus, learning to understand the concepts and instructions in the *Gita* is to participate in an action-theoretic exercise. One can cognitively grasp the form and function of the actional frame even when the actual practices may be in need of critiquing or even jettisoning. Action concepts in a practical life-form function differently than as a gatherer of elements that fall under them.<sup>10</sup> To understand how they function, we need to figure out how a matrix functions. Let us take dietetics as one such matrix. One is in this matrix when one pays attention to food or substances that nourish, and to actions that help the end of nourishment, which may be health in the sense of well-being. It can be a simple matrix of diet—*pathya*—or it can be an elaborate matrix comprising diet, exercise, and....meditation. The presence of the latter in this matrix does not mean that it cannot be part of another matrix. Indeed, crisscrossing matrices are the rule, but the point is that a matrix is an identifiable, individuable unit. Yoga could be a matrix on its own, or it could be part of the Dietetics matrix or, to take a seemingly unGandhian example, the Erotics matrix. I need to say a lot more about the notion of matrix, but for now, I hope a clear enough sense has emerged for us to understand

Gandhi's experiments in the *ashram* as cognitive acts that were designed to restore the reflective dimension of the actional frame. The experiential world in this frame needs sites of ethical learning to proliferate.

There is a powerful philosophical picture of how action is explained that has attained the status of self-evidence, namely the desire/belief model of explaining action. If this picture has attained the status of common-sense or folk theory, as philosophers claim or imply, then we can understand why action in general and ethical action in particular has retreated so far that philosophical understanding does not even sense that there is something deeper to explore. My proposal, inspired by Gandhi's reading of the *Gita*, that action can only be action in a matrix will therefore appear utterly counter-intuitive especially to that common-sense and the philosophical understanding that upholds it. In any case, learning to detach or unbind actions from subjective ends involves carrying out cognitive acts. Both ethical action and self-knowledge involve concepts that can only be understood action-theoretically. To grasp the full significance of this extraordinary interpretation of Indian philosophy, we will need to explicate the action-theoretical view of concepts in terms that we can make sense of. That is to say, we will have to evolve our own action-theoretic concepts, in the same way Gandhi did through his engagement with the *Gita*. One of Gandhi's constant refrain is that the Indian stories in the *kavyas*, *puranas*, and *itihosas* are not at all historical but are experiential! Without moralizing, they provide structures for clarifying experience and models for situating action within a matrix.

In recovering or reformulating Indian philosophy's original problematic and in restoring its integrity, he used terminologies and strategies that can often be an obstacle to understanding his insight or his particular practices. I would argue that his particular conceptions, bound as they are to contingent circumstances of history, should not become a hindrance. For example, while we can appreciate why he thought spinning as a symbol of the actional frame enabled reflection of a certain kind, it would be foolish to insist that spinning should be made that kind of symbol again. Similarly, he often used terms and concepts that clearly belonged to what I have been calling the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame, although his own concern was to move items that were put there to the actional frame. Thus, he vehemently argues that we cannot separate "religion" and "politics," using the terms of the secularism doctrine to express an insight that properly belongs to the actional frame! The profound intuition to which he was giving expression, namely the inconceivability of removing *dharma* from *rajakaran*, needs further articulation, but the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame cannot accommodate it, saddled as it is with a borrowed normative language. Even more intriguing or challenging is Gandhi's use of "the caste-system," which, like "corruption," contains the normative evaluation of Westerners' experience of Indian domains. When he says that he wants to defend "the caste-system," his intuition here too is the same as in the case of religion and politics, except the argument needed to clarify and defend that intuition requires alternative conceptualization of the

experiential/actional domains.<sup>11</sup> It is necessary, therefore, to clear away terminological and frame confusions in order to develop Gandhian alternatives to the dominant left/liberal understanding. This is necessary because the discourse in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame is a deployment that has tended to obscure and undermine the actional frame that sustains the ethical universe of Indians.

When Gandhi, using his peculiar terminology, called the state a “soulless machine,” he was in essence expressing the same thought. The question for us is whether his critique of the state and, more generally, of the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame can be developed in such way that we can today not only effectively show that the continued deployment of that discourse has damaged our practical passionate relation with one another but also begin to outline an alternative conception of politics? A question critical to the development of Gandhian philosophy is the relationship between the two frames: while it is clear that Gandhi sought to show the distorting effect of the quasi-cognitive frame, to what extent does that frame inhere in the entities that it brings in, such as the natural sciences, normative moral and political doctrines, and social scientific discourses? A lot of careful work needs to be done to specify what goes into each frame—in fact, it can be shown that things can get moved between frames. No language or discourse or any such items necessarily come stamped with the frame. As Gandhi clearly saw (and as we have witnessed in the last few decades), *Ramayana* or the *Gita* could be placed in the quasi-cognitive/ normative frame, thereby completely changing their character. But what we need to understand is what happens when the items from this frame are placed in the actional frame. A theorization of this would enable us to grasp the complexities of our present, for the actional frame, stripped of its ethical reflection, has “tamed” in some manner the other frame. While Gandhi could be said to have used reflective action against normativity and thus staked everything on regenerating reflection in the actional frame, we would want to say that genuine cognitive activity with regard to social and cultural sphere is yet to take place but is still possible even as we would want to agree with Gandhi that making the actional frame reflective is a matter of survival.

## VI Coda

The central concern of Indian intellectual traditions has been: how to set up sites of ethical learning. They thought that we needed as many of them as possible for what is unethical is whatever occludes experience and experience-occluding structures are everywhere, whether it is the body, the sense of “I-ness” (*ahamkara*) or social structures. So, ethics is attunement of reflection to experience (*anu-bhava*), by removing any and every form of ignorance (*avidya*) that distorts experience or occludes it altogether. The unethical person in this culture is the person who cannot learn, that is, one who is not attuned to experience. But colonialism brought in structures that effectively

disrupted the transmission of ethical learning and displaced the sites of learning. Part of this process involved bringing norms and normativity that effectively created two frames in the cultural universe of Indians. The peculiar coexistence of two frames has created problems of a kind that has not even been registered, let alone theorized as an ethical, political, and cultural problem: the description of daily ethical activities acquires a tone of immorality, when seen through the frame of norms (as we saw in our discussion of “corruption”), but the frame of norms itself has remained alien, because obviously even colonialism could not replicate conditions and institutions that generated normativity in the West. The peculiar misunderstanding and misapplication of normative concepts that we saw in Chatterjee and Matilal is in that sense quite reassuring!

What insulates reflection from experience? The insulating material is discursivity, that is, discourse employed in a certain way. Norming a site, founding a practice, giving reflexivity to practice are all roughly equivalent descriptions. I have used the term “deployment” for reflection that develops after the insulation and that uses discourse from different sources (thus deployment of feminism, of nationalism, of Indic or Orientalist thought, and so forth). In more concrete terms, all of them involve making discourse pass through a practice or making a practice discursive. Language or more accurately discursivity plays a central role in constituting normative institutions/structures. Perhaps one of the major reasons for the first frame to go underground, or become mute and ineffective, is that when the discursively structured normative institutions/structures—what might be called the garrulosity of the West—are unleashed in India, it is as though they provide their own understanding; the discursive structures, what gets taken to be “theories,” are what compel a sense of understanding by providing a way of speaking. Normativity or the second frame is anchored when we begin to “buy” into those “theories”—theory of the state, discourse on freedom and equality, chunks of European history functioning as cognitive schemes (feudalism, secularism, revolution, and so forth). It is easy to overlook that they are what need to be understood—what I termed the unconceptualized concepts. We still have not realized that. To reiterate a point I made right at the beginning, the predicament has to do with our life with concepts generally and not only with concepts of classical Indian thought. It should also be obvious by now that the predicament cannot be understood as a translational problem or a problem of language.

I have tried to frame the predicament of Indian thought. That framing owed a lot to Gandhi; in the last section, I tried to show how Gandhi’s attempt to find a way out of the predicament brought about a creative engagement with Indian thought. Implicit in that attempt is the conviction that resuming Gandhian experiment and inquiry is the route to take. We will begin to understand a lot more about that experiment and that inquiry, including why it seemingly never took root, only when we begin to probe the very many different deployments that are holding us enslaved.

## Notes

- 1 The whole paragraph in which this crucial remark appears is discussed in the section “Gandhi and the *Gita*” below.
- 2 Aristotle’s practical philosophy, on the other hand, seems to have suffered the same fate as Indian thought, perhaps for reasons that are not too dissimilar.
- 3 The prefix “quasi” is needed because, as we will see, there is no real cognition involved, only a normative reformulation of experience that effectively occludes it. The awkwardness of the phrase, therefore, is small price to pay to capture the operation involved.
- 4 Since the metaphor of “frame” appears in very different disciplines and thinkers—in psychology (Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman’s work on biases and heuristics), in sociology (Erving Goffman’s frame analysis), in cognitive science (Daniel Dennett’s frame problem), and philosophy (Akeel Bilgrami has used frames in two or three different contexts)—it may be wondered where mine comes from. My frames have a different motivation, function, and scope than all these, though there may well be some common features. Nothing at this stage really hangs on clarifying the affinities and differences.
- 5 The remarks on sovereignty are meant to highlight a problem that Indian historians and political theorists seem to have some trouble noticing. For a detailed investigation of the trajectory of secularism, see the work of Balagangadhara and his students (De Roover and Balagangadhara, 2008; De Roover, Claerhout, and Balagangadhara, 2011).
- 6 In a recent treatment of the issue, Chatterjee asserts that the illegality of the poor, unlike that of the rich, “mobilizes moral justification” (Chatterjee, 2011). This seems more like a laudable sentiment than an empirical observation.
- 7 Matilal suggests that Arjuna is confronted with “must kill and must not kill” situation. That is a double bind rather than a dilemma. For an interesting review of the literature on moral dilemmas, see MacIntyre (2006). The obsessive and moralistic fixation on the stage-setting first chapter of the *Gita* too seems peculiar to Western commentators on the text (many of whom recoil in horror from what they regard as immoral injunctions of the text). As Gandhi points out, many great Indian commentators, like Shankara, simply skip the first chapter. Gandhi dismisses such obsessions as irrelevant, but his discussion of the issue is extremely instructive (Gandhi, 2001, 33: 887–88).
- 8 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this normative conception of politics. In his recent treatment of this issue, Chatterjee launches an attack on normative political theory for being ahistorical and for ignoring or preceding all the political movements. Surely, it is a normative narrative that Chatterjee himself is putting in place. The sequence of alternative modernities that Chatterjee prefers is normatively structured too. Polytheism is after all modeled on monotheism.
- 9 To understand the significance of this point, think of what Marx did to commodity, money, and capital, the entities of bourgeois political economy. He reconceptualized them, thereby giving us a different understanding of the fetish character of these entities, rather than letting them dictate their understanding on us.
- 10 For an insightful discussion of the role of concepts such as “life-form,” “form of life,” “action,” and “practice” in practical philosophy, see Thompson (2008, 2013). We will draw upon his Aristotelian-Fregean conception of “phronetic epistemology” to elaborate my idea of practice.
- 11 As we saw in Chapter 2, Gandhi’s most subtle interpreter, Akeel Bilgrami fails to appreciate this point (Bilgrami, 2003), which I admit is a difficult one to get hold of (even more so than the “corruption” phenomenon, with which it has parallels). The advantage of the two frames idea is that it provides us with the resources to show how what is postulated or normed into being in the “actional” frame cannot

exist there and yet appear, under certain conditions, in the “quasi-cognitive/evaluative” frame. Although it will require immense amount of work to demonstrate the argument, since the context and the framework is in place, let me briefly assert it: there cannot be anything like “the caste-system” in the domains that actional frame covers. Gandhi was making that point except that he used the term found in the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame (as he so often did) to designate what we can only understand after much reconceptualization of the actional domain. That indeed is the work of reconceptualization we need to undertake to break free of the enslavement. In short, to see what Gandhi saw, and to say what he saw, we need new conceptual resources. But if I am right about the frames, there should be no difficulty in getting hold of the intuition, exactly in the same way that we firmly grasp Gandhi’s argument about never separating “religion” and “politics.” There are also extremely crucial comparative questions to be asked about these frames in the context of Western culture.

## 4 Truth or Fact? Reframing the Gandhi–Tagore Debate

I am not sure that even now educated India has assimilated the truth underlying the *charkha*.

—Gandhi<sup>1</sup>

If Gandhi embodies truth, as Tagore always insists,<sup>2</sup> why does he nonetheless persistently criticize Gandhi for presenting fact as truth? If Tagore thought that Gandhi confused truth with fact, Gandhi was clear that the poet is a modern poet, that is, he invents, unlike presumably the *kavis* of yore. In contrast, Gandhi considers himself a “discoverer,” who holds on to what he discovers, namely truth, since that is the only thing worth discovering. The disagreement between Gandhi and Tagore matters precisely because they are not simply taking different stands on an issue, are not only disagreeing about strategy or tactics, are not simply assigning different priorities to what needs to be done; their disagreement seems to arise despite their shared conception of truth. Is the disagreement then about how truth is to be accessed or experienced?

### Conceptual Loss and Becoming Indistinct

It is indeed rare to find a debate sparked off by a contemporary issue acquiring such philosophical depth and poignancy. It would simply amount to no more than a lament if all that this debate prompted was a contrast with the utter shallowness of political debates in India or elsewhere. Lament, however, is the least appropriate attitude to these debates for, far from restricting us to the historical period or to the historically specific issues, the questions they raise compel us to rethink the relationship between action and truth in domains as far apart as art and poetry on the one hand and economy, politics, and nature on the other. What is of significance is not the fact of disagreement as such but the nature of the disagreement. The most contentious thing that divides them is of course the *charkha*. Even here, it is not so much the grounds on which Tagore criticizes Gandhi’s advocacy of *charkha* that is of philosophic interest as Tagore’s sheer incomprehension of it. This

incomprehension—a philosophical incomprehension, if you think about it—is what underlies Tagore’s disagreement not only over *charkha* but also three other issues: *swadeshi*, non-cooperation, and Gandhi’s “superstitious” belief about the 1934 earthquake in Bihar being a punishment for the sin of untouchability.<sup>3</sup>

This incomprehension, I am saying, is far more significant than the actual arguments Tagore marshals against Gandhi, even though the arguments always begin with an elaborate and weighty statement of what the Mahatma embodies, which finds Tagore’s spiritual endorsement. What makes the incomprehension such a puzzle is the fact that over many a domain Tagore and Gandhi share the same intuitions. They both share the conviction that nationalism and the state are profoundly alien to India; they are both skeptical of the advantages (to use a Nietzschean phrase) of history. That they share these extraordinary intuitions when most of the colonial intelligentsia fully, if uncomprehendingly, embraced these wonders of modernity must count for something. So, what makes the debate particularly compelling is not the fact these two minds disagreed—they might have done so for any number of reasons. Underlying the disagreement is Tagore’s seeming incomprehension of Gandhi’s acts and attitudes. The incomprehension, I want to argue, presents a deep puzzle since the intuitions they share about nationalism, politics, and history—which is developed independently by each and which shows a cultural stance that has great cognitive and practical potential—flows out of their conception of truth. When, therefore, Tagore is claiming that Gandhi embodies truth, he is not simply being deferential. Or, rather, he is endorsing Gandhi spiritually because he sees Gandhi’s insistence on the integrity of truth converging on his own quest for unity that overcomes all separateness. And yet, we witness Tagore’s criticism of Gandhi’s positions expressing itself as a question about whether what Gandhi stands for is fact or truth. Couldn’t they then have disagreed about the use of *charkha*, non-cooperation, *swadeshi*, and “superstition” and still be in agreement over truth? Tagore’s own position, in effect, amounts to that. But the really fascinating case to be made is that if Tagore’s conception of truth convergences on Gandhi’s, then Tagore could not have shown the incomprehension his comments actually reveal. Was Tagore being inconsistent or was Gandhi simplifying? Who remains confined to facts and who expresses truth?

This question or the framing distinction is Tagore’s. How do we understand this distinction or the relationship between the two terms? Because both Gandhi and Tagore are concerned to understand the experiential conception of truth that is so central to the Indian intellectual traditions, the relationship between the two terms of the distinction—fact or truth—has unexpectedly deep philosophical resonance not only in their individual work and practice but in their debate too. The relationship is analogous to how a *raaga* relates to the notes that comprise it: the notes, like facts, do not have any significance until the *raaga* emerges, but the latter cannot come into being without the notes. Tagore explicitly uses that analogy to draw us into

the most challenging of all the relationships that Indian thought addresses itself to: between *vidya* and *avidya*. The distinction between fact and truth, therefore, speaks to us even though there is no ready philosophical apparatus to help us get a grip on it.<sup>4</sup> It certainly goes to the heart of both Gandhi and Tagore's thought; indeed, the philosophical interest of their work lies in how each of them struggles with Indian thought to clarify his intuitions and formulate his insights regarding the experiential concept of truth.

What do we hope to gain by exploring this struggle? We will learn something about what colonialism did to the structure of Indian thought itself and how two of the finest Indian minds responded to it (and, while doing so, to one another). It's their respective understanding of how to think with Indian thought that underlies their debate and conversation. Because they were committed to that pursuit, studying their disagreement makes us confront again a question that no longer seems to be a live question anymore despite its centrality to our self-understanding. Namely, is there a *distinctive* Indian thought or conceptual world that is worth reconstructing, exploring, and developing not only because it is a distinctive *thought* capable of yielding knowledge but the neglect of which has made us obscure and indistinct, unrecognizable to ourselves? Convinced of the distinctiveness of Indian thought, of its distinctive achievement, its potential to provide an intellectual understanding of and response to the violence of colonialism, both Gandhi and Tagore were committed to unearth it, nurture it, and allow it to unfold the unity of truth or express the integrity of experience in the present; they saw that task as essential to resist the vicariousness, the parasitism that the cognitive enslavement to Western thought colonialism had created. For them, not only our self-understanding but understanding the very nature of understanding itself depended on it. This practical inquiry—it is practical in the first instance since it has to do with living—which defines the core of their work as well as their conversation or dispute seems to receive no attention after Independence. It is as though this intellectual struggle meant nothing to the next generation of scholars, writers, or politicians, with the result that we are even unable to recognize the absence of genuine intellectual debates today.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when reading Gandhi or Tagore, we rarely pause to consider the kind of intellectual struggle they engaged in while reconnecting to the life with concepts embodied in Indian traditions. This is in part because we tend to assume that when they employ concepts from Indian thought, their access to the semantic and epistemic horizon of those concepts is without any uncertainty or hesitation and that somehow those concepts are received by them fully formed. The assumption may be bolstered by our sense that, when it comes to concepts of Indian thought, we are more distant from them than they were. At any rate, there is evidence enough to show that Indian intellectuals, mistakenly perhaps, think of their relationship to Western concepts—rights, equality, freedom, civil and political society, nationalism, etc.—as unproblematic and their understanding of them impeccable, whereas they would be less confident about their relationship with and understanding of concepts from Indian thought. Whether or not

this is indeed the case, when we read Gandhi or Tagore, we rarely interrogate their thought with a view to understanding their struggle with concepts. We have to understand their divergences (as indeed their convergences) through their struggle with concepts. Tagore's argument that if we want to gain India in truth, we have to make her more fully distinct in our minds informed all his intellectual activities (including the founding of the university). Gandhi's *satyagraha* was explicitly aimed at ethically strengthening the intellectual traditions that he thought had become hollowed as a result of colonialism.<sup>5</sup> When Tagore argues that the domain of modern education has rendered India indistinct and derivative, he was echoing Gandhi's diagnosis of Indian predicament in not only education but in politics and economy too. Indeed, as we shall see, both of them locate the distinctiveness of Indian thought in the centrality that it accords to *learning*. The experiential conception of truth begins to acquire clarity and depth as both Gandhi and Tagore elaborate the idea that learning is what makes an action ethical in whatever domain of life, be it erotics or economics or education.

Tagore's diagnosis of the predicament of Indian thought was that colonialism and, in particular, colonial education had made the Indian mind diffuse, helpless, and obscure to itself. Consequently, India itself had become indistinct. How to make India "distinct" was how Tagore formulates the task for himself and his contemporaries. Tagore reworks a thought from *Ishopanishad* to both characterize the predicament and find a creative way out. In what follows, I will make an attempt to reconstruct Tagore's argument and explore its philosophical depth, plausibility, and fruitfulness. That will make it easier for us to grasp the deep affinity between Gandhi's and Tagore's thought. Once the frame that shows the deep convergence of their views emerges with its distinctive horizon, we will be able to use that frame to grasp how the different domains of the colonial present they were confronting are normed and distorted by another frame that actively repulses the horizon of understanding these two thinkers were trying to elaborate through their struggle with Indian thought. Using the terminology introduced in the last chapter, I shall call the former "actional frame" and the latter "quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame."<sup>6</sup> That is to say, a deeper understanding of the convergent frame itself will provide us with the resources to reframe the debate between them in such a way that we can both see why their divergences pose a puzzle and explain how the divergences come about. The reframing, then, is at the same time an attempt to resume their remarkable struggle with the concepts and conceptual capacities of Indian thought, their own debate with one another illustrating the difficulties involved in making it available to understand the present.

### The Education of Desire

The central insight of Tagore's thought enables us to conceptualize the link between social structures and the training of desires that characterizes Indian culture. What had begun to appear as excessive restrictions was anything but

that: the elaborate set of actions that constitute sociality train desire in such a way that no residue is left behind. The learning that enables such actions to be invented, executed, and stabilized objectively as a *practition* cannot be restricted to any domain; it is at the center of all domains of activities. Hence, Tagore's poetic invocation of the figure of *Saraswati* sitting on the lotus to signal the centrality of learning to all spheres of life in Indian culture. What is special about this education, what sets it apart from the way education is conceived in the West? Learning directs action to assimilate truth or what is the same thing, achieve practice in such a way that it is impossible to imagine the act as subjective. Tagore gives the example of the villagers who think nothing of offering water to his overheated car despite the fact that water is scarce. As Tagore puts it, these villagers cannot think of themselves without this *dharma*, generosity, which for them is not a special or heroic act. The deepening discovery about action shedding its subjectivity in practice is the only way to understand the phrase "assimilation of truth." The kind of learning or education which involves "assimilation of truth" takes centuries to achieve and when that learning disintegrates the objectivity of practice, the person and act begin to come apart, you only have *bhava* without *anu*. Understanding what causes this disintegration was an important intellectual task for Tagore. The person-end unity explains what it is for a person to become vague or indistinct to oneself. In another example Tagore gives, we see this clearly: a child who has just got himself a new toy from an English shop refuses to join the children immersed in play and they are playing with whatever crude things they have devised. The play is what reveals the creativity, the *dharma* of childhood, not the toy, which now begins to "obscure" the revelation of that *dharma*. In yet another example, we see the people of Mahsud protecting the pilot who was bombing their village but whose plane has crash-landed in the village. Their "ideal" of hospitality does not allow them to separate that truth from the rhythm of relationship they have assimilated it into. So, *dharma* is this rhythm of relationship, the simplicity achieved by the complete assimilation of truth. This simplicity is, as Tagore puts it, "the product of centuries of culture," and it is "difficult of imitation." When Tagore talks about learning being at the center of life in all domains in India, he is pointing to the process that has created this rhythm of relationship, what I have been calling practice, the person-act unity. He realizes that some process set in motion by colonialism is causing the disintegration of "this rare fruit of a higher life." He insists, therefore, that "we must get to know this force of disintegration and how it works" (Tagore, 2007, IV: 722–4).

To figure out how it works, Tagore, like Gandhi, takes the indirect route of understanding in greater depth the matrix that makes possible the practice, the acts that assimilate truth. After all, an explicit understanding of the Indian sociality or, put differently, a theoretical understanding of the practical life would help localize where the force is having its disintegrating effect, even though it may not tell us much about the character or provenance of the

“force” itself. That, at any rate, is the route that both Gandhi and Tagore take, and they converge very deeply in their description of Indian sociality and the commitment they think it elicits. The route they take is inescapable given their diagnosis of conceptual loss suffered under colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Hence, Tagore’s claim that “until India becomes fully distinct in our mind, we can never gain her in truth” (Tagore, 2007, VII: 665). The reverse too holds, since the process would have to be (virtuously) circular—only by attempting to gain her in truth that one can make her distinct, since Tagore’s claim is not nationalistic (the idolatry of geography, as he calls it). We have grown so accustomed to the liberal/left view of colonialism as, notwithstanding all the violence and depredation, a conceptual gain, we have never quite examined in any depth the idea that colonialism involved a conceptual loss of a very serious nature. For a culture centered on practical form of life, this loss effectively entailed an impoverishment, even destruction of experience. Both Tagore and Gandhi grasped the implication of the experiential loss. Tagore was perhaps the first to attempt a theoretical reflection on how to come to terms with the loss. Indeed, both Tagore’s *Our Swadeshi Samaj* (2010) and Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (1997) could be read as vivid portrayals of, and cultural response to, the peculiar life with concepts that colonialism had forced Indians into. Finding ways of accessing the conceptual world that was disrupted or distorted by colonialism became the central preoccupation for both. Significantly, both the thinkers turned, literally and conceptually, to the *ashram* to respond to the predicament India and Indian thought found itself in.

What kind of thing is this *ashram*? Surely, the vague image it invokes in the mind is itself a testimony to the conceptual loss caused by colonialism. What kind of concept is it? Is it a place or a concept or an action/practice? Or perhaps all three? *Ashram* is to be understood above all as the site where one learns how the person and acts are united, where action testifies to the assimilation of truth: one learns, Gandhi would say, how to learn. It is not necessarily a physical place though both Gandhi and Tagore also set up a physical *ashram*. But this physical space—a cottage in a remote forest—does not capture the idea of *ashram*. It is better understood as any site that teaches or brings about the practical mode of relating to the world. The deepest way to understand what both Gandhi and Tagore sought to do with *ashram* is therefore to see it as a complex action-theoretic concept: a concept that can only be understood by engaging in actions of certain kind, actions that purify or actions that train desire. So, *ashram* is the place/site to learn concepts again, learn to act again. Tagore’s meditation on *tapovan*—not as a fact of Indian history but as a truth of India’s past—and Gandhi’s commentary on the *Gita*—not a “scripture” that commands but an experiential reflection that teaches how to understand action—are attempts to re-access a lost or ruptured conceptual world, so that we learn to be responsive to concepts, the loss of which had rendered that world and ourselves indistinct. Without responsiveness to concepts, a culture loses its creativity, as conceptual capacities are not engaged any more or only intermittently employed. Cognitive

enslavement under colonialism involved deploying concepts that insulated experience from reflection, thus depriving them of responsiveness. As Tagore points out, this “obstruction”<sup>8</sup> did not merely foster ignorance of a conceptual world, which (to paraphrase him) at least holds out the prospect of future knowledge but active contempt for it, which rules out any possible responsiveness to it, now or in the future.

The idea of the *ashram*, which Tagore thought is slowly taking root through his own experiment, has at its core in the training or education of desire:

This four-fold way of India attuned the life of man to the sublime harmony of the universe, leaving no room for untrained desires to forget their simple relations therewith and to pursue their destructive career unchecked, but leading them on to their final relations with the supreme.

(Tagore, 2007, VII: 677)

A natural extension of this action-theoretic notion gives us the clue to reimagine how practice must be conceived.<sup>9</sup> The self, in this picture, is nothing other than the residue of untrained desire, what blocks the access to truth, without which there is no completion of the harmony of relationship, that is, no love, in Tagore’s vocabulary. The education of desire through the *ashrams* needs the ends, the *purushartha*. The latter provides ends not as goal but as tendencies in which everyone participates (or tendencies which everyone manifests); each *ashram* (*brahmacharya*, for example) needs to evolve matrixes to purify action [“the tuning of our life’s strings into purer spiritual notes” as Tagore describes the effect of the *ashram* (Tagore, 2007, IV: 413)]. The elaborate structuring of sociality in India—“the strict regulation of the most intimate details of the daily life” (Tagore, 2007, VII: 671)—expresses how the idea of the *ashram* integrates *purushartha*. It is important not to see each of the *artha* as a goal but as a tendency that can be articulated in multiple matrixes. Seeking wealth or power needs articulation such that wealth or property can signal prosperity (*Lakshmi*) which everyone can share or participate in. Creativity of a culture is to find or construct multiple ways—multiple because different psychologies can be accommodated. The four ends—*dharma*, *kama*, *artha*, *moksha*—are not phases or sequences, nor is there a hierarchy necessarily. They are dispositions, but to the extent that a culture has elaborated them over a long period of time, they are already interpreted dispositions, each of which in any given time and place could have multiple and crisscrossing matrixes. Each *artha* could be used at a meta-level to interpret and understand itself and the others too. One may be desirous of *dharma* or knowledge (*jijnasu*) or one may be desirous of *mukti* (*mumukshu*) while pursuing wealth. The *dharma* of erotics or *kama* pursued properly could lead to *moksha*. A king, like Janaka, may be ruling, pursuing *artha* and *dharma*, but he may have already achieved *moksha*. The fundamental insight behind this way of elaborating the idea of *ashram* is that “the universe cannot be so madly conceived that desire should be an interminable song with no finale” (Tagore, 2007, V: 217). “Desire,” therefore, he goes on to say, “must

be yoked to work for the purpose of transcending both desire and work” (Tagore, 2007, VII: 671–72). The discipline is not mere elaboration of custom but is linked to wisdom, to experiential knowledge, so it must not simply be a “plagiarism of the past” or of other cultures (Tagore, 2007, IV: 737). Therefore, for Tagore, the freedom through discipline is quite distinct from and far superior to the political liberty of the West. This philosophical contrast elaborates a distinction Tagore had drawn as early as his *Our Swadeshi Samaj* between the importance of the state to the West and the centrality of *samaj* to India.<sup>10</sup> Tagore suggests that “political liberty … actually curtails freedom” while freedom through discipline enhances itself. This freedom achieved through the training of desire brings about a different kind of individualism:

Individualism was also the object of India’s quest—not the narrow kind, however, for it tried to gain this larger individual freedom through every detail of life, every relation of family and society. And as in Europe her ideal of freedom has manifested itself in the full rigor of mechanical and military bonds, so the ideal of India found its expression in the strict regulation of the most intimate details of the daily life. If we fail to see the ideal behind and focus our view on its external manifestations which are of the present age, then indeed in India individual liberty appears most thoroughly fettered.

(Tagore, 2007, VII: 671)

Indian intellectual traditions are so many different ways of refining, expressing, and elaborating sociality in an attempt to gain experiential knowledge. When Gandhi asserts that he sees no difference between the so-called “Hinduism,” “Buddhism,” and “Jainism,” he is pointing to the structure of practical knowledge that characterizes Indian traditions. And when Tagore discusses *Ishopanishad* in the same breath as he comments on the insight of a *Baul* song, he understands how they both pursue the same kind of knowledge.

The framework that emerges here through Tagore’s interpretation of the *ashram* idea enables us also to integrate Gandhi’s defense of *varnashrama* from the point of view of his experiential conception of truth. *Varna*, *ashrama*, *purushartha* are action-theoretic concepts; they enable us to act in order to understand the dispositions everyone manifests. Educating those dispositions, putting those to work, seeking a certain orientation to the stages of one’s life are activities guided by reflections of a certain kind. If for Gandhi the *Gita* served as the exemplary reflection of this kind, Tagore always returns to *Ishopanishad* (interestingly Gandhi thought the *Gita* helps interpret the latter). They are not foundational in any way in relation to practices. They orient our life with concepts in order for our actions to be learning experiences, leading to the complete assimilation of truth into the rhythm of relationships, so that ultimately *sat* and *dharma* are one, are interchangeable (as the opening lines of *Brihadaranyaka* declares). What does it mean for me to see myself as a *brahmachari*? Do I have to do that only when I am young

or can it help locate myself when I am not so young? What does such self-location or self-orientation involve? What disciplines will help me, what practices I follow or evolve? I am suggesting that the employment of *varna* (or *guna*) is no different. Gandhi was seeking to understand the problems of his day through the actional frame, though perhaps hastily and misleadingly using the terms from the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame. What I am calling the actional frame is nothing other than the attitude that Gandhi takes toward knowledge: "... in the act of knowing the self [*atman*] we get to know something about other objects, and we have the right to derive what enjoyment we can from this external knowledge, as it is part of self-knowledge." So, the *ashram* initiates the process of learning what is worth learning about or as Gandhi puts it "learning is knowledge of what is worth knowing about" (Gandhi, 2001, 19: 199–200). Without this experiential conception of knowledge to structure their meaning, the action-theoretic concepts such as *purushartha* or *varnashrama* become vacuous (or, as indeed what has transpired, are subjected to grotesquely normative sociological interpretation). In the action universe, the temporality of action and experience follows a rhythm that is different from the temporality of tense. Gandhi's act of *satyagraha* is a continuation of the action/reflection in the *Gita*, which as Gandhi emphasizes is a record of someone's experience.<sup>11</sup> Responsiveness to concepts in this universe involves preserving the temporality of action/experience. When an act succeeds in that we have practice.

Tagore however insists that if the ends disappear the elaborate crisscrossing matrixes, comprising minute regulations, the varied disciplines become rigid and uncreative, as they tended to when colonialism sought to comprehend, explain, manipulate, and moralize them, through its quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame, causing thereby the practice to disintegrate. It is this frame and the conceptual deployment that takes place within or through it that insulates experience from reflection: the actional frame, deprived of its reflective dimensions that help unify discipline and wisdom, person and act/end, becomes over a period of time, just disposition.

Under colonialism, there are many sources that cause the insulation; one obvious source Tagore focuses on is the Western education and its institution, the university which when implanted in India produces clerks, deputy magistrates, and interpreters (as both Gandhi and Tagore put it.) This for the obvious reason that

European university is in their parliament, literature, in books, activities of their corporate life....[T]heir education has its permanent vessel which is their own mind; its permanent supply which is their own living spring of culture; its permanent field for irrigation which is their own social life.

(Tagore, 2007, IV: 523)

When this living organic unity is transplanted in India, the education becomes a chariot that instead of carrying Indians "drags them behind it." The larger

reason, however, has to do with the way the different domains of life are lived in the Indian conceptual world. When this conceptual world is broken up, not only do these domains lose their salience and intelligibility, they become insulated by the conceptuality that colonialism brings in, through education, administration, proselytization, and so on. Tagore's worry was that India "will allow its priceless inheritance to crumble into dust, and, trying to replace it clumsily with feeble imitations of the West, make herself superfluous, cheap and ludicrous," if she does not look at the world with its own view of truth produced by its mind/culture (Tagore, 2007, IV: 642). He firmly believed that "India has proved that it has its own mind, which has deeply thought and felt and tried to solve according to its light the problem of existence. The education of India is to enable this mind of India to find out truth, to make this truth its own whenever found and to give expression to it in such a manner as only it can do" (Tagore, 2007, IV: 515).<sup>12</sup>

### Parasitism

If education "obstructs" the Indians' interaction with their conceptual world and at the same time produces an enslavement to a frame that prevents any genuine cognition or action, what sustains such insulation and allows its reproduction? This is a crucial question for both Gandhi and Tagore (as it is for us even now); here too their answers, brief and condensed as they are, converge. Both think that colonialism from the very beginning grafted an elaborate structure of parasitism on Indian society. Gandhi too long held that it is first colonialism and then capitalism that fosters dependency and vicariousness among Indians. With the rupture of the complex practical matrix that articulated Indian sociality, Indians' entanglement in economic and political institutions created by the colonizers meant that the structure of parasitism simply got disguised in political and economic discourses. Am I then saying that institutional structure in the West is essentially a structure of parasitism? Both politics and economics in the West are domains that testify to the transformation of the practical. But this transformation was the result of the theio-practical project: each practical domain—economics, erotics, and politics—was deeply normed. That is to say, rationality and morality were deeply entwined institutionally. Legitimation of authority, lawfulness, protection of interests and rights are expressions of normed sociability in the West. It is wrong to say that normativity conceals the parasitic structure, though it is true that when the sources of normativity are threatened, society descends into criminality and chaos. That's why Tagore was right to say that European societies cannot be imagined without the state. When this frame comes to India—the way of looking and organizing things—they come without the deep theological background that normatively structure the domain of politics, law, and civil society. The institutions simply foster parasitism and the normative discourse becomes pure ideology. Thus, Tagore could argue that:

What in the West is called democracy can never be true in a society where greed grows, uncontrolled, encouraged, even admired by the populace. In such an atmosphere, a constant struggle goes on among individuals to capture public organizations for the satisfaction of their personal ambition, and democracy becomes like an elephant whose one purpose is to give joy ride to the clever and the rich.

(Tagore, 2007, VII: 693)

Gandhi realizes why it is necessary to resist the separation, the privation, colonialism/capitalism brings in. There is no truth; there can be no truth to our relationship to the proliferating world of objects, commodities. Nor can there be any truth to the various institutional arrangements in which I am forced to live, using various ideologies to justify, manipulate, or internalize but not understand (since there is no truth to them). What prevents the assimilation of truth into practice in the contemporary world? It may be appropriate here to reflect on what the practical is not: it is not the pragmatic, it is not the analog of the theoretical, it is not the instrumental, it is not the technological. Although these are to be found in the practical, the latter is not reducible to or exhausted by them. In fact, their overwhelming determination of the practical is preventing the assimilation of truth into practices. I have set out a framework, drawn largely from Tagore and Gandhi, which allows us to see how both these thinkers insist on seeking explanations of the Indian predicament, its indistinction, its having disintegrated into facts, from within the actional frame, so that the very activity goes toward making the frame distinct, even as the explanation offered illuminates what has rendered India indistinct and helps in seeking ways to strengthen the *dharmic* activity. The actional frame is what Tagore calls the rhythm of *dharmic* activity that helps “assimilate truth.” So, the task of education becomes clear and gets situated at the deepest level. Gandhi went very far in seeing that the other domains too need activities which assimilate truth. Tagore too saw it, but in his disagreements with Gandhi, Tagore succumbs to what I would like to term the framing effect that characterizes cognitive enslavement.

### **Responsiveness and the Assimilation of Truth**

To say India has become indistinct is to say that the actional frame has become dormant, has, as I put it, become dispositional. We are no longer able to learn/teach what Tagore calls the “assimilation of truth.” To become distinct again or make India more one’s own is to understand how to *assimilate truth as one goes about in different domains*. The fact is that the actional frame which has made possible the kind of example Tagore gives illustrating the rhythm of life, *dharma*, has so completely fractured that it does not organize the saliences of our sociality anymore, nor does it have the resources to create new practical matrixes. Tagore’s (and Gandhi’s) conviction was that the practices are still intact enough for them to take the route of re-articulation or re-elaboration

rather than having to accept a new system like the one colonialism brought in, namely the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame. The central insight of their reflection may well be that the latter and the concepts and baggage that come with it are not learnable in the sense of “assimilation of truth.” Far from allowing for our responsiveness, they insulate our experience from our reflection. Therefore, Gandhi’s demand that the intellectual center and economic center should not be separated. What about politics? Gandhi is clear there can be no separation there either, but Tagore? Tagore, as I have shown, should agree, but he insists on the autonomy of economics (and by implication politics too?). He seems not to understand what satyagraha is all about—that it is a way to resist that separation. Tagore’s concern that India had become indistinct is therefore related to the frame argument; and he too sees it that way and yet succumbs to the framing effect himself in his argument with Gandhi. He is the one who forcefully shows how Indian sociality must be regarded from the actional frame, how the Indian past should not be regarded through a certain conception of history, how the liberty that anchors the Western institutions is not the freedom through minutely regulated practices that the actional frame makes possible.

I have developed the practical matrix idea as a framework that presents what is deeply convergent in the thinking of Gandhi and Tagore. The convergent frame enables us to situate the very frame that has generated the problem. It does so by showing how the conceptuality that comes with the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame—whether it is political concepts or “the caste-system” and other such “entities”—blocks our responsiveness to the conceptual world that was/is ours.<sup>13</sup> We can begin to understand what goes wrong when that responsiveness is missing or when we suffer from a loss of concepts and conceptual capacities. Their struggle with Indian thought had, therefore, the two-fold objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the conceptual world of Indian culture—what they sought to do with *ashram*—and at the same time develop that understanding into an explanation of the present predicament. They were both constantly going back and forth between their intuitions about Western culture and their struggle to grasp Indian thought. In fact, Tagore’s discussion of the place of education in Western culture and the centrality of learning for Indian culture is an excellent example of how they went about their task of understanding the present, its saturation by what I have called the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame, by a reconstruction of the sociality of Indian practical life and its vicissitudes under colonialism.

Now, if we go over the four areas of their disagreement—*swadeshi*, non-cooperation, *charkha*, superstition—from the vantage point of their convergent frame, we do have a puzzle on our hands. To take the most straight-forward or unproblematic cases first, both *swadeshi* and non-cooperation flow out of the desire to resist the separation between person and the act in the practical matrix that structures practical life, gives discipline or practice its point. This Tagorean language is one insightful way of understanding Gandhi’s *satyagraha* as an attempt to resist and overcome that

separation. For Gandhi to argue that something—the *charkha*, for example—makes no economic sense is to already give in to the separation of person and act or, to put it another way, place the person outside the practitioner.<sup>14</sup> To use Tagore’s example, one might as well be arguing that for the villagers to give water to Tagore’s overheating car makes no economic sense. Non-cooperation, as Gandhi powerfully expresses it, is a “retirement within ourselves” (Bhattacharya, 1997, 91) in order to learn to act again, in order, that is, to learn how to unify person-end when the structure of parasitism seems to have sucked in all actions. Do we continue to aspire to become clerks and magistrates or do we relearn *dharma*? Gandhi takes a stand that may, to us, seem like courageous but which, to him, is merely consistent with his (and Tagore’s) sense of the unethicality of the separation and the submission to parasitism (what both call *maya*). Gandhi’s refusal to separate ethics and economics and ethics and politics has a philosophical basis that we have articulated in a frame that expresses the deep convergence of these two thinkers.

When Tagore criticizes *swadeshi* on grounds that it is up to economics to tell us what we should produce, his criticism therefore is inconsistent with his own deeper philosophical view about actions, desire, and ends. Similarly, when he criticizes non-cooperation for its disengagement with the wider world, in effect accusing Gandhi of narrow-minded provincialism, he is betraying his own deeper conviction:

Once upon a time we were in possession of such a thing as our own mind in India. It was living. It thought, it felt, it expressed itself. It was receptive as well as productive. That this mind could be of any use in the process, or in the end, of our education was overlooked by our modern educational dispensation. In fact, we have bought our spectacles at the expense of our eyesight.<sup>15</sup>

(Tagore, 2007, IV: 643)

Non-cooperation was an attempt to remove the spectacles that was hurting Indians not only in education but in politics and economics too. Gandhi was against a cosmopolitanism that was really imposing global parasitism; he was in no doubt about what the Indian culture or mind could teach the world. He was however mindful of the fact that under colonialism Indians were reduced to sub-human condition. The question Gandhi was asking himself was: How does one make this humanity in this animal state realize its human potential to act? Revitalizing the actional frame is not a task for the idyllic future when contented people come forward to create matrixes to train their desires; it’s an urgent task for the now, when Indian humanity is reduced to animal-like condition. So, how to create an *ashram* for the whole *desh*? How can the whole *desh* be turned into a site of learning? The *charkha* was the instrument for turning the *desh* into an *ashram*. It is difficult to describe the imagination that made such an act real except perhaps to invoke the

actional space of *Puranas* and *Mahakavyas*. Yes, it is staggering but not incomprehensible once we grasp the deeper idea of *ashram*, an idea that Tagore himself was articulating. So again, it's a puzzle why Tagore uncomprehendingly portrays Gandhi's advocacy of *charkha* as thoughtlessly asking people to numb their minds. His attempt to develop an explicit theory of parasitism to show why dependency on the *charkha* is a form of parasitism goes against his own subtle understanding of the relationship between *avidya* and *vidya* that *Ishopanishad* talks about. The difficult thought there is the necessity of *avidya* for the realization of *vidya*, but naturally not the exclusive cultivation of *avidya*. The theory of parasitism that Tagore develops in his critique of the *charkha* almost turns into some version of historical materialism or a doctrine of progress that sees steel age as better than what preceded it, some set of material/object/means of production as better than another set.

### Action, Experience, and Truth

For Gandhi, *yajna* is the prototype of all ethical actions, because it frees itself from the (subjective) conception that enslaves action. But that enslavement of action also comes about when desire is invested in objects and seeks its truth or validation in them. The thought in *Ishopanishad* for Gandhi revolves around how the act is to be separated from desire and the outcome, for it is only then that seeing oneself in everything and everything in oneself can be realized as a non-voluntaristic and non-subjective reality, an experience of *sat*. Thus, the *Gita*, he says, is a commentary on this insight. The same insight animates Tagore's play with the distinction between fact and truth that recur in different contexts in his reflections and that is meant to resonate with his preoccupation with the way *Ishopanishad* talks about the relationship between *avidya* and *vidya* (or as he also puts it, between the finite and the infinite). For both these thinkers, as I have already remarked, thinking with the concepts from Indian thought, re-apprenticing themselves to the latter, was the only way to understand the effect of colonization. Once we register this, it is impossible not to notice in their work (including in the correspondence between them) creative engagement with those concepts, developing them further to comprehend the present, using them to demarcate the source of the cognitive enslavement. For Tagore, the task was to recover the truth from the scattered facts colonialism had reduced India to. Thus, he resorts to the truth of the *tapovan* (not its fact) to understand how Indian sociality was constituted. Tagore's elaboration of the insight from *Ishopanishad* clarifies the way *anubhav* as knowledge is linked to the discipline of relating to and accepting (and knowing in that practical, experiential sense) the world: "We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it" (Tagore, 2007: IV, 401).

This is, as we have already seen, Gandhi's conception of experiential truth. Tagore formulates the same thought a little differently, by distinguishing in effect between two kinds of knowledge and the learning that goes with each:

Our learning is of two kinds: through knowledge and through *anubhav* ...the sense of becoming in accordance with something else. It is not just receiving information from outside; it is a maturing within oneself. To apprehend is to experience one's own self in some particular color, form or savor, perceived through one's link with external matter.

(Tagore, 2001: 294)

He thought the former does not overcome the division or separation that we face; it's only the latter that makes possible unity.

The consciousness of the real within me seeks for its own corroboration the touch of the Real outside me. When it fails the self in me is depressed. When our surroundings are monotonous and insignificant, having no emotional reaction upon our mind, we become vague to ourselves. Art realizes the unity and makes it humanly significant.

(Tagore, 2007, V: 174–75)

Art is the obvious example but he thought that relationships or sociality needed the learning from *anubhav* and that the Indian traditions focused their energies on seeking that learning.<sup>16</sup> For learning is what enables subjectivity not to remain as a residue but instead to disappear as the corroboration from *sat* takes place.

The inner maturing in accordance is maturing by relating to the element which links, reflects, or unites. It is in contrast to the knowledge that divides. The other too is knowledge element/medium (*jnana swarup*) as I myself am: so, seeing *atman* in everything and everything in *atman* is the maturing process. Working through this insight about the practical life allows Tagore to speculate on the significance of the literature such as the *Puranas* and *Mahakavyas*:

In India, the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God; he belongs to our homes, as well as to our temples. We feel his nearness to us in all the human relationship of love and affection, and in our festivities He is the chief guest who we honor. In seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of the rain, in the fullness of the autumn, we see the hem of His mantle and hear His footsteps. We worship him wherever or love is true....It is thus that the domain of literature has extended into the region which seems hidden in the depth of mystery and made it human and speaking. It is growing, keeping pace with the conquest made by the human personality in the realm of truth. It is growing, not only into history, science and philosophy, but with our expanding sympathy, into our social consciousness.

(Tagore, 2007, IV: 344–45)

By religious, we will take him to be meaning what is *adhyatmic*; here, the relationship between *avidya* and *vidya*, finite and infinite, fact and truth, notes

and *raaga* is more completely laid out, giving us a clue to Tagore's own attempt to sing the significance of the intricate practical life into being again in the face of its disruption and devaluation by colonialism. The practices that unite discipline and wisdom, the time, event, season that call forth certain action and reflection, the expanding sphere of truth, that is the acceptance of happening, nature and the world, of form, color, savor, and shape, all these are reflected and recounted in the literature. But they need to be reflected on again, thought about again, sung again. Now, consciously, reflectively so that the thought and practice can grow again, encompass the present, illuminate it, incorporate the new but still be deeply itself. "Let us then try to become deliberately, strongly, actively and completely what we really are," Tagore had announced in his seminal *Our Swadeshi Samaj* (2010: 408). Curiously, in his debate with Gandhi, Tagore seems to place an interpretation on this idea of becoming actively what we are, becoming more distinct, that is at odds with how he explains the "conquest of truth," with which Gandhi would agree too. It's the experiential conception of truth that Gandhi was resolutely bringing to bear on all the domains of practical life, trying through *ashramic* practices and *satyagraha* to encompass them in reflective action. It may be that Gandhi is often criticizing something—material civilization, technology, the state—when what he really means to say is whether the experiential conception of truth would be able to bring it within its reflective ambit or whether they are experience-occluding, that is, unethical.

### Frame Switching

Something strange and peculiar begins to happen then in Tagore's debate with Gandhi. The language of the infinite, as it were, is there, but the thought is no longer continuous with it or with the convergent frame. A discontinuity, then, in the attempt, shared by both them, to render the present intelligible in the actional frame and through the *cultural explanation* that can be developed from it? Or an inconsistency which begins to appear consistently? Tagore begins to contradict Gandhi even when doing so seems to make him contradict his own philosophical commitments.<sup>17</sup> Is it because Tagore at some level regards Gandhi's thought as simplistic and simplifying drastically a world it has ceased to understand? Or is it because Tagore does not fully grasp what is involved in creating the space for the integrity of action in all domains, restricted as he was to his experiment in education? Thus, for example, his different answers for how to view both politics and economics, in *Our Swadeshi Samaj* and in his letters to Gandhi. Similarly, he praises Gandhi as a master practitioner, implying that he is not theoretically articulate. But we have to be careful in not seeing that mastery within the theory/practice distinction; in the actional frame, there is no theory/practice divide for reflection and action are differently related. It is as though Tagore begins to switch between frames when the task is one of consistently working up an explanation of the present from the actional frame. It may be possible and

even plausible to argue that Gandhi to some extent simplifies or at any rate applies prematurely the action frame explanation to understand the present and intervene in it.<sup>18</sup> But it is an entirely different matter to keep returning to the present in a language and a frame both have been problematizing. It is because Tagore keeps shifting between frames that he does not see the link between the structure of parasitism and the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame. One has to conclude, then, that the reason Tagore is forced to reveal his oscillation has something to do with Gandhi's resoluteness in engaging the present through the actional frame. But for this dialogue that stretched over so many years, we may not have suspected that Tagore himself had succumbed to the framing effect of colonialism.

It is not only that we had "hit upon the device" of getting things cheap "by proudly conducting our beggary in threatening tone," not only that we were "ecstatic" because "everything worth having in the political market was ticketed at half-price" (Bhattacharya, 1997: 73), the indifference to the quality of what we were getting, to the nature of the pursuit—scientific, artistic, or political—we were only imitating, was concealed by the assumption of the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame. Parasitism therefore did not involve only rent-seeking, or creaming off, or brokerage of Western agencies (as Gandhi put it), it had to block off the reflection on action and ends that was part of the actional frame. It's only when the language of modern economics or politics come in that it becomes justifiable to say let "the language of economic science" decide what we produce or the language of politics—of political liberty—decide what institutional arrangement we should have. The reinforcement of the one by the other, the dependence of the one on the other could only be interrupted and functioning of the parasitic structure fully revealed only if the actional frame could be activated. As Tagore remarks, where we do not understand, we cannot be just, and where truth is imperfect, love can never have its full sway. But if we are not able to resist and break the link between the structure of parasitism and the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame, we will only be imitating the Western pursuits, whether in the sciences, the arts, or in other domains, becoming more obscure to ourselves, and will gradually lose the cognitive ability to perceive this state of affairs too. Gandhi's *satyagraha*, the attempt to set up sites of ethical learning, was a concerted attempt to break that link and reveal the structure of parasitism. Tagore had seen that too:

But before Asia is in a position to co-operate with the culture of Europe, she must base her own structure on a synthesis of all the different cultures which she has. When taking her stand on such a culture, she turns toward the West, she will take with a confident sense of mental freedom, her own view of truth, from own vantage-ground, and open a new vista of thought to the world. Otherwise, she will allow her priceless inheritance to crumble into dust, and, trying to replace it clumsily with feeble imitations of the West, make herself superfluous, cheap and

ludicrous. If she loses her individuality and her specific power to exist, will it in the least help the rest of the world? Will not her terrible bankruptcy involve also the Western mind? If the whole world grows at last into an exaggerated West, then such an illimitable parody of modern age will die, crushed beneath its own absurdity.

(Tagore, 2007, IV: 642)

Unfortunately, the feeble imitation of the West has come to stay, whichever domain we take, no longer feeble in the drive to be Western-like, becoming more ludicrous by the day. Or so it appears. Gandhi was the more consistent thinker who had no doubt that unless the actional frame and the experiential truth it makes possible provides the matrix to assimilate the pursuits we want to learn from the West by grasping and rethinking its deepest insights and discoveries, we will only be parasites and this parasitism linked as it is to cognitive enslavement (indeed made possible by it) will in the end leave the actional frame without any nourishment.<sup>19</sup> So, Gandhi's *charkha* whose underlying truth he said the educated India still has not assimilated is not a fact, not just *avidya*, nor for that matter non-cooperation and *swadeshi* just facts. They were attempts to render India distinct so as to gain her in truth. It is difficult then to see how Tagore could have disagreed with Gandhi, but disagree he does, even at the cost of inconsistency, which he does not see because of the framing effect of colonialism. Once the insulation of the frames kicks in, there can no more be any responsiveness to the conceptual world of practical life. And the conceptuality that comes through the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame is only capable of being deployed or used for manipulation. Tagore does not pause to examine his desire to see reason reinstated; reason is evidently in the service of holding in place the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame, and from that frame, the kind of reasoning/reflection involved in the actional frame, in the reflective shaping of the practical matrix, the assimilation of truth into the rhythm of life and relationship is not even recognizable as reason/reflection. That's the point Gandhi is making when he says that the educated Indian mind has not assimilated the truth of *charkha* (so it cannot be said to be truly educated, as Tagore had pointed out in his discussion of the villagers' *dharma*).

### Reflection and Practical Form of Life

How to rediscover or how to reinvent the deepest rhythms of the practical life is the common question facing both these thinkers. Whether it is to learn to act again, relearn the conceptual surrounds of the actional frame, or whether it is to relearn how to train desire and re-elaborate sociality—festivals of seasons, of places, ancestors, gods, and Tagore's attempt to sing their significance into being again, the issue cannot be reinstating reason. The kind of reflection needed to sustain the going about that makes possible experiential knowledge and truth has no bearing on whether something is scientific

or not (in some scientistic sense of the term). It's strange then why Tagore takes objection to Gandhi's remark about the earthquake as unscientific. If there was anyone who could appreciate that Gandhi was not making a causal statement about the world, but engaging in reflection about a particular kind of world and the problem it was facing, it would be Tagore. Rather than trying to validate or endorse Gandhi's remark, I simply want to undermine the impulse to call it "unscientific." When Tagore contrasts the obscene pursuit of wealth in New York City with the wealth that Lakshmi transmutes into well-being, it would be sheer scientistic crudity to criticize him for being unscientific. Whether we feel we are able to endorse his judgment or not, we certainly cannot be thinking that there is some science that will help us decide what we have to do with the world that the actional frame brings into being. We know this graceful goddess, we know the stories about her, and we have the practice of offering *puja* to her. Maybe she helps us to regard wealth in certain way, as Tagore so insightfully brings out when, elsewhere, he contrasts Lakshmi with Kubera and induces the kind of reflection on ends that practical life requires. In any case, it is to miss the point to call that remark unscientific or superstitious.<sup>20</sup>

On all the four issues that divide them, Tagore, as we have seen, is consistently inconsistent. It is because this consistency that the two frames idea had to be invoked. That idea has a greater generality going some way toward locating, if not explaining, the predicament that Indian thought finds itself in. Sometimes, however, Tagore seems to shift the problem onto the followers of Gandhi, as though they will not see what Gandhi sees. He admits that Gandhi is truth itself rather than a walking quotation (like other intellectuals and his own compatriots), someone who has been able to speak the language of the people. Nonetheless, the people, he fears might be misled by Gandhi's own idiom, whether that involves *charkha*, superstitious talk, and ascetic negativity. What he doesn't see is that only because of that common language that Gandhi could achieve responsiveness to the conceptual world he was certain they still accessed. For Gandhi thinking with concepts evolved from Indian thought was continuous with the effort to break with cognitive enslavement; these concepts once developed would not be simply Indian, they could be employed by anyone. The rejection of the division between economics and ethics, politics and ethics would be based on developing concepts that would show why economics and politics as they are today leads to the violence of separating practitioners and selves. Therefore, when I say Tagore succumbs to the framing effect of colonialism, it is to imply that somewhere Tagore is unable to sustain his effort to think with Indian concepts. The default language he reaches for then is the language that saturates the colonial present (and our present too), the language that conceals the parasitic social structure which he is so critical of. Tagore's switching between frames is instructive for us because that is our predicament too, except that Tagore, when he was in the actional frame, did create resources to both imagine and access the practical form of life, whereas our recourse to it now is almost dispositional, and

our view of it is from the distorting lens of the other frame.<sup>21</sup> Domains like economics and politics repulse reflection of the kind Gandhi and Tagore were trying to bring into being. We would rather ask if the *charkha* makes economic sense<sup>22</sup>; we do not wish to undertake an inquiry into experiential truth, like Gandhi did, and ask if economics makes sense. Utilitarian consequentialism, which has given the philosophical basis to economics, has made it perfectly natural for moral philosophy to ask if it is rational to be moral, whereas both Gandhi and Tagore would have sought to reflect if it is ethical to be rational. Such reflection will not be an alternative Gandhian economics or politics in some doctrinal sense, but it will honor non-violence as a way of discovering experiential truth.

Practical form of life makes it possible for those living in to discover experiential truth. The practical form of life that was able to structure multiple ways for people to learn to live with desire or learn to be happy or learn to train desire without residue. Those multiple ways involved sites of learning and teachers who implicitly or explicitly instructed one how to use them. The learner was conceptually (which does not necessarily mean propositionally) equipped to assess where one is, what is the appropriate way to pursue wealth such that Lakshmi “transmutes it into well-being” (Tagore, 2007, VI: 575) or power such that one discovers *dharma*. Do I pursue a path of erotic learning or do I practice abstinence as a way of learning about desire? That form of life, as I say, enables one or equips one to assess one’s life. The reflective pursuit is helped along by many things, stories, elders, the elaborate kinship system, the temples, the festivals. In a way, these are props or devices that help lead that life, take a learning attitude to living, but in principle, it could be done in another surrounding, with may be some other props that get set up. The question that Gandhi and Tagore asked and debated, then, needs to be asked again with some urgency because the parasitical and experience-occluding structures are smothering the pursuit of a happy, learning, or inquiring life that is capable of bringing new practitioners into the world.

There is one question that may seem inescapable at this stage: if Tagore hadn’t succumbed to the framing effect and had fully shared in the Gandhian attempt not only to seek a cultural explanation of our present from the actional perspective but also to engage with that present to discover experiential truth, could he still have disagreed with Gandhi on the very same issues? What form would or could that difference have taken? I am not sure if this counterfactual question can really be answered. However, it might make some kind of speculative sense to argue that such a disagreement would have made the debate fully a part of the Indian conceptual world, in the way, for example, the debate between Buddhists and *Vedantins*, or *Advaitins* and *Dvaitins* was part of that world. This is simply another way of putting the more obvious consequence of my attempt to reframe the debate between Gandhi and Tagore: we need to reengage with the conceptual resources of Indian intellectual traditions to develop knowledge that help overcome the violence of separation (*maya*) everywhere in the world, but beginning at

home makes sense because the resources are in some form still available and because Gandhi and Tagore have illustrated both the possibilities and pitfalls of that attempt. But the task is to enable anyone from anywhere to engage in the inquiry into experiential truth by creatively using what resources there are, so that experiential knowledge begins to reshape the human sciences.

For Gandhi, practical form of life and experiential truth go together; their separation generates violence. The “genius of Indian civilization,” he thought consisted in integrating the two. Through the discovery of experiential truth, he wanted to write new things on what he called the Indian slate (Gandhi, 2001, 58: 210). Tagore showed how for Indian thought there can be no justice or love without understanding permeating all areas of life; his attempt was to revitalize that thought. We need to expand that area of understanding, because the practical form of life makes us realize that there is happiness in understanding. There are areas in contemporary life bereft of reflection; perhaps all of us need to rethink the old in a new language or as Gandhi and Tagore did rediscover the insights contained in the idioms of Indian thought, even as we look for new culturality or practitioners (new socializing resources or devices) to deepen our reflections and extend it to new areas. That way, we will better understand how the old practical form of life arranged its culturality to aid inquiry and reflection. Gandhi and Tagore were part of a movement that was largely political; though they did see the intellectual dimension of the movement, pragmatically politics took priority since they were battling the colonial power. By reframing their debate, I am hoping their reflections will become part of a movement that will now be primarily intellectual (rather than social or political) because to extend reflection and understanding to new areas involves freeing ourselves from the frame that insulates those areas from reflection.

## Notes

- 1 Bhattacharya (1997: 88).
- 2 “Here was the truth at last, not a mere quotation out of a book” Bhattacharya (1997: 76).
- 3 All the material of the debate has been collected in Bhattacharya (1997), with an elegant introduction that both summarizes and historically situates the debate.
- 4 In any case, where truth is involved, it would be foolish to look for such ready help! Although in contemporary analytic philosophy, truth has been at the center of discussion again, the dominant trend has been to treat truth deflationally. The only relevance of these rather technical discussion to our concern here may be the conclusion that most seem inclined to draw, namely that any epistemic conception of truth is unviable (see Davidson, 2005; for a useful survey, see Künne, 2003). Of greater relevance for our discussion here would be the demanding yet rich analysis of the changes that Christianity brings to the Greek conception of truth in Heidegger (1992).
- 5 Although I present here textual reference for my interpretation of Tagore’s arguments, see Chapter 2 for my reconstruction of Gandhi’s arguments.
- 6 It is significant that something like that idea is implicit in both Gandhi and Tagore, and that, furthermore, the explication of that idea helps in reframing the debate

between them, thereby making that debate directly relevant to our own contemporary effort to overcome the framing effects of colonialism.

7 Despite its obvious importance as a widespread cultural phenomenon, the problem of conceptual loss has not received much philosophical attention, certainly not as much as conceptual gain or incommensurability of conceptual worlds. For some helpful discussion, see (Diamond, 1988; Lear, 2006).

8 “It is a slavery to continue to live in a sphere where things are, yet where their meaning is obstructed” (Tagore, 2007: VII, 730).

9 This seems to me to be the route to understand *varnashrama* and *puruṣartha* (see below). To make sense of it in terms that would orient contemporary reflection on action would require some serious philosophical work—the kind that both Tagore and Gandhi had initiated.

10 “Europeans must have the state if they are to live, we must save the regulations of *dharma* for our communal life” (Tagore, 2010: 399).

11 See the section “Gandhi and the *Gita*” in Chapter 3.

12 Tagore’s searing and illuminating analysis of how colonial education has transformed a culture which once had inquiry, hypothesis formation and which thought of itself as a teacher into a culture which now produces “eternal rag-pickers in other people’s dustbins” (Tagore, 2007: IV, 654) contains the best justification for postulating the two frames idea.

13 Once the matrix idea is in place, it is possible to argue how “the caste-system” is the product of a frame that comes with colonialism. To say this is to say that the entities in that frame are not amenable to theorization—we know as much or as little about “the caste-system” as we did in let’s say the 18th century. The more interesting question is why that frame brings up entities that are of this nature, that is, they are incapable of being understood. Because they are incapable of being understood, their deployment effectively stifles any creative responsiveness the practical form of life needs to nourish itself.

There is a question here for Tagore and Gandhi too. When they talk disapprovingly of some Western idea being “mechanical,” do they have in mind something like what I am saying here about the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame? It seems perhaps that they do mean some force that turns ideas into manipulable entities. Thus, their problem with nationalism, class, the state, and other such entities (which has a component of ideology or discursivity of some kind). They have no view which they counter-pose to nationalism; their objection would be that there indeed are “views” of this kind (ideologies).

14 In Marx’s language, it is to succumb to fetishism of commodities.

15 A very succinct way of formulating the two frames idea.

16 Since colonialism has disrupted this learning, he even wonders whether the former, knowledge for its own sake, could have brought us together and made us distinct. Although parasitism had of course taken over that avenue too, it is questionable if that pursuit could be a substitute for experiential knowledge, what Tagore calls learning through *anubhav*. It is common to regard Gandhi as hostile to science. Gandhi however tried to raise the more difficult question of how experiential knowledge could bring the conception of knowledge underlying the natural sciences within its purview and how the two could interact. A remark like the following makes us think again about how he might have thought about the interaction: “I find that it is the old looked at in the true light of modern science which should be reclothed and refashioned right.”

17 He begins opposing the negativity of Buddhist *nirvana* to the affirming *ananda* of Vedantic *mukti*! And this from a thinker who has given us the subtlest philosophical understanding of how the pursuit of a *Baul* or a *Vedantin* is no different from a Buddhist or how the poetry and philosophy in India are engaged in the same practical task.

- 18 Engaged as he was in the movement against colonialism, he could at best indicate the ground of such an understanding than actually elaborate it to extend to all spheres. In any case, that could only be done action-theoretically, not simply with a treatise, if my argument has been on the right track. Marx's critique is the only example we have of an attempt to reconceptualize the fetish domains of capitalism (created by what we have called the quasi-cognitive/evaluative frame). Although he sought to articulate a practice conception of truth, his critique is not integrated with it. We will therefore need to rethink the critique of fetishism from the perspective of experiential conception of truth (see chapter 5)
- 19 Without a language or reflective dimension, but still a force as a disposition—we have the phenomena of contemporary politics and business. Even resistance to that is without a language, as we witnessed in the anti-corruption movement of Anna Hazare.
- 20 Similarly, when we say a certain *raaga* can only be sung at a particular time of day, there is no science, either meteorology or physics of sound or psychology, that is the basis for that practice.

When reading or watching Oedipus at Rex, do we think that Greeks were unscientific or superstitious when the Thebans complain about the plague that has come about because of some polluting act and ask the king to punish what has gone unpunished? It may well be that Tagore's own work too sits in two frames: his philosophical reflection and songs in the actional frame, aiding its revitalization, and his novels which uneasily and ambivalently sits in the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame.

There is perhaps one more issue between these two great minds that remains unexplored, namely whether it is ever right to form one's politics or thought as though one is in or confronting an emergency. In his uncompromising response to Tagore's criticism of the cult of the charkha, Gandhi says that India is like a house on fire. To save this house of *dharma*, he seems to say everyone must abandon whatever he/she is pursuing, the poet his poetry, the lawyer his law-books, the doctor his scalpel. Tagore perhaps objects to this state of emergency thesis. His thought seems to be that we contribute best by persevering with our craft, practice, or profession. Even if it were a situation of emergency, wouldn't the house of *dharma* need people who have experience in transmitting certain ways of going about the world which is what is under threat? I am indebted to Narahari Rao for pressing this question.

- 21 Imagine a singer who engages with the world through sound losing his/her conceptual capacities. Not only is he/she not able to sing—engage the world—she cannot even respond to sound anymore or do so only intermittently. The practical matrix that made possible that conceptual response simply withers, as there is no creative engagement anymore. The singer no longer has the conceptual ability to enter that matrix. Suppose we now extend this example to the world of Carnatic or Hindustani classical music—the singers and the involved (that is, educated) followers suffer a conceptual loss over a period of time: the singers or listeners are barely able to engage with the complex practical matrix that house the conceptual capacities, without which there are no innovations, no new action. Suppose we now imagine the larger practical domain of which the musical world is a subset (but also a microcosm) undergoing a conceptual loss. The example of musical world is important for two very different reasons: one, music illustrates very well the fact that the conceptual capacity involved is not propositional. Two, it is indeed remarkable that in the real world in which the conceptual loss has happened, the musical world—whether that of Carnatic or Hindustani—has survived as a genuine practical field with vigorous innovations and creative explorations. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the only field in which we have

witnessed genuine excellence in a sustained way for over a century now, precisely the period of parasitism in other fields. Well, that's where we are; the example will, I hope, bring to mind the enormous complexity of the practical form of life, the senses in which its conceptual capacities organized the very diverse learning and responsiveness that an experiential conception of truth demands.

22 As Amartya Sen asks (2005: 101). Sen's anodyne portrait of Tagore as a defender of “reason” and (of all things) anticipator of Hilary Putnam’s “internal” realism makes him into an 19th-century English liberal consequentialist with some mildly eccentric (hence embarrassing) view about religion. Sen wilfully ignores the Tagore of philosophical essays such as *Our Swadeshi Samaj*, the Centre of Indian Culture, Personality, the Fourfold Way of India, Creative Unity, or any number of letters and lectures where he explicitly develops what I have been calling an experiential conception of truth, which has no echo in Western philosophy. The core of that conception makes clear how Tagore regards reason: “For the reality of the world belongs to the personality of man and not to reasoning, which, useful and great though it be, is not the man himself” (Tagore, 2007: IV, 368). What’s depressing about Sen’s essay is its dogged attempt to find Tagore “reasonable” from a Western lens, filtering out, in the process, Tagore’s attempt to think with Indian concepts. Ironically, the only place where Tagore insistently speaks about reason is in his critique of *charkha*, which has generated for us the puzzle of why Tagore is occupying the frame—the quasi-cognitive-evaluative frame—which finds incomprehensible the actional frame that he (Tagore) himself is trying to revitalize. That Sen is firmly anchored in the same frame but without even suspecting the existence of another frame speaks to the predicament of Indian thought, its having become even more indistinct.

## 5 Marx, Foucault, and the Secularization of Western Culture

“Among all the societies in history, ours--I mean those that came into being at the end of Antiquity on the Western side of the European continent--have perhaps been the most aggressive and the most conquering; they have been capable of the most stupefying violence, against themselves as well as against others. They invented a great many different political forms. They profoundly altered their legal structures several times. It must be kept in mind that they alone evolved a strange technology of power treating the vast majority of men as a flock with a few as shepherds. Thus, they established between them a series of complex, continuous, and paradoxical relationships”

(Foucault, 2002: 303)

That spirituality is (perhaps the better) part of religion is a deeply held assumption of secular Western thought. Only in Michel Foucault’s late lectures do we find a Western thinker realizing that what opposed spirituality, and subsequently suppressed it, is not science, but religion. This chapter will reconstruct Foucault’s reasons for making that startling claim and then explore how the early Marx’s insight into secularization of European culture could be deepened with the help of Foucault’s genealogical analysis of the disappearance of spiritual knowledge in the West.

### Two Interpretive Problems

Let me begin with two textual or interpretive problems, taken from the works of Marx and Foucault, respectively. I will use the conceptual resources I have been developing to bring the two problems face to face in such a way that the problems and the solution to them have the potential to throw entirely new light on how we must understand the secularization of the Western culture. The interpretive problems will thus be shown to have a significance that far transcends their exegetical context.

The first problem has to do with Marx’s remarks that persistently draw analogies between Christianity (as a religion) and (features of) capitalism. These analogies begin to appear in an intriguing light when we try to make

sense of Marx's claim in "On the Jewish Question" that the truly religious/Christian state is not the state that professes or embraces Christianity but the one that is secular (Marx, 1975: 222). Exegetically, we cannot set apart the latter claim and the recurring analogies. Since my aim is not exegetical, I will not be making any attempt to pursue in detail these analogies to speculate about the underlying pattern in Marx's thought. Instead, I will focus on his characterization of the secular state as the truly Christian/religious state and explore its theoretical presuppositions. Exegesis will not solve our problem even when we take into account the analogies that Marx continues throughout his life to draw between capitalism and Christianity. We will need to ask: what theory of religion and secularization would give coherence to Marx's intriguing intuition? (At this stage, it is nothing more than that). These remarks taken in conjunction with his witty and insightful characterization of what Luther's Protestantism accomplished set the stage for our conceptual exploration. In a set of remarks written using the rhetorical device of inversion that was so characteristic of his early writings, Marx says that Luther abolished the distinction between priests and laymen by turning all laymen into priests (Marx, 1975: 251; 342). Unlike many of his purely rhetorical inversions, this one is a gem of an insight that, if framed rightly, has the potential to throw light on the process of secularization in the West. Where does spirituality fit in this story?

To answer that question, we need to take up the second problem: nearly as intriguing, and, needless to say, as enigmatic as the early Marx's claim about the secular state is the late Foucault's claim that what opposes spirituality in European thought is not science but theology (Foucault, 2005: 27). Spirituality disappears or gets radically transformed from European thought and sociality (I put it this way rather than saying European culture for reason that will become clear later on) under pressure from theology, that is to say, from religion. He further claims that the transformed spirituality finds expression in the 19th-century European thought, especially Hegel and Marx. Doubtless one manifestation of that presence, however transformed, is precisely Marx's intuition regarding the secular state and its political treatment of religion and civil society. Having stated how one intriguing and enigmatic intuition can be supported and clarified by another similarly intriguing and enigmatic claim, it is time to see how we can go about seeking a theoretical defense and elaboration for these claims. Let me start with the second problem, that is, with Foucault and his extraordinarily rich lecture series for the year 1981–1982 made available to us as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault, 2005).

In the same way as Marx never makes clear what in Christianity (as religion) makes him characterize the secular state as the truly Christian state, Foucault too never addresses the question "what in Christianity (as religion) makes it hostile to experiential knowledge?" (I will often use this term interchangeably with spirituality so that we gradually stop associating the latter with its Christian surround). Why is theology, the discourse, the science, or

the self-description of religion, opposed to spirituality? Although this question is there to be asked, there is a reason why it does not occur to Foucault to raise it in this form. I will come back to it. Let me instead focus on “spirituality,” which Foucault discusses with great clarity and richness of detail. Spirituality or experiential knowledge has to do with exploring the conditions for the access to truth. Let us note the careful formulation: access to truth; not *knowing* truth (*connaissance*).

### Access Versus Knowing

The claim, which is both systematic and historical, is that “the care of the self” and “know thyself” were linked motifs in the long summer of the Hellenic and Roman thought, which brought into being a flourishing culture of the self for about a millennium, starting in the 4th century BCE. The startling discovery for Foucault is that this remarkable period has simply disappeared or has been driven underground by the two other models that have come to dominate the historical account, namely the Platonic and the Christian. In the Platonic model, both the motifs are present but “know thyself” acquires a distinctly or exclusively epistemic character, so much so that anyone who has not read Foucault’s discussion of what that dictum means would be baffled by this sentence! Well, it meant something completely non-epistemic: before you undertake a vow to the Delphic oracle, make sure you have the ability to fulfill it. While the Platonic model still gave a central place to the “care of the self,” it totally disappears from the Christian model, to be replaced by something unknown to both the Greek and the Roman cultures, namely faith.

The major task Foucault sets himself is to document the delinking of the access to truth from the condition of spirituality, from the practices that prepared the subject for truth that transformed him in his being. The access to truth becomes transformed into knowing/having truth. The transformation is complete with no trace of the condition of spirituality for access to truth when Descartes formulates *ego cogito*, and later, Kant goes to the extent of denying that the structure of the knowing subject is knowable at all. The ground for this transformation was prepared by Christianity:

This theology, by claiming, on the basis of Christianity of course, to be rational reflection founding a faith with a universal vocation, founded at the same time the principle of a knowing subject in general, of a knowing subject who finds both his point of absolute fulfilment and highest degree of perfection in God, who is also his Creator and so his model. The correspondence between an omniscient God and subjects capable of knowledge, conditional on faith of course, is undoubtedly one of the main elements that led Western thought—or its principal forms of reflection—and philosophical thought in particular, to extricate itself, to free itself, and to separate itself from the conditions of spirituality that had previously accompanied it and for which the

*epimeleia heautou* was the most general expression. ... During these twelve centuries the conflict was not between spirituality and science, but between spirituality and theology.

(Foucault, 2005: 26–7)

For the “care of the self” culture, the subject is not capable of truth unless he or she undergoes a transformation or conducts certain operations on himself or herself. But the self to which the subject is seeking access to, the truth, is not the self—empirical or transcendental—of the philosopher. Nor is it the other world or kingdom of the Christians. The access sought was to a dimension of consciousness itself—self-consciousness, if you like, as long as it is not understood egoistically, as having the structure of the ego. If the access to self or truth needs transformation through spiritual practices, in a very different way, the access also transforms the subject in his or her very being.

So, the element that is neither the subject nor the object, but which can be accessed in multiple and multiply diverse ways, all attempting a transformation of the subject, the element which is both the beginning and the end, what initiates the transformation and what completes the journey, brings about a complex relationship between culture and sociality. The innumerable diverse modes of access—all the many philosophical schools and “cults”—generate cultural learning in the different practical modes that are elaborated throughout what Foucault calls the golden period of the Hellenistic/Roman model of the self. Thus, sociality, the relationship between people, the different socializing structures, begins to be modulated and articulated by the cultural learning that emerges in the practical explorations of the conditions of spirituality. Different groups or schools will bring in different domains of life—economics, medicine, art, erotics—within the ambit of the care of the self. The tendency is for the care of the self to “become coextensive with life” (Foucault, 2005: 86). Even intellectual knowledge (*connaissance*) here is in the service of or subordinate to the practices of the self. Any aspect of life—love, old age, friendship, or any activity, economics or dietetics—can become the domain of application for the care of the self. This knowledge, this learning, is what is cultural which articulates or modulates the social, which in its turn sustains the cultural. It may seem that “cultural learning” is, in some sense, a pleonastic expression. I use it nevertheless to formulate the deep concern that explicitly subtends both Marx’s and Foucault’s inquiry into forms of knowledge that articulates or disarticulates the social.<sup>1</sup>

## Normativization

The context is now set for understanding how Christianity, born in this milieu, sharing on the face of it many of the motifs and problematics pursued by the schools, communities, and groups that practice the care of the self—motifs such as conversion, salvation, return to self, self-knowledge—nevertheless radically and unrecognizably transforms those motifs and problematics. In

fact, as Christianity begins to be ascendant, theology on its behalf begins to separate the condition of spirituality from the access to truth, transforming the latter into an autonomous development of intellectual knowledge (*connaissance*). The separation or uncoupling takes the form of an attack on the activities and domains—love, friendship, economics, dietetics, politics—that the “care of the self” culture had sought to integrate or to bring within its ambit. In other words, the sociality that was nurtured and articulated by the “care of the self” begins to be stripped of its cultural knowledge. The separated domains are subjected to a process of what we termed “normativization,”<sup>2</sup> since the activities in these domains get transformed by subsuming them under moral norms, so that theology can examine the “truths” of these domains. Here is Foucault’s analysis of the Christian model and its difference from the “care of the self” model:

I think we can say that in this model knowledge of the self is linked in a complex way to knowledge of the truth as given in the original Text and Revelation: knowledge of the self is entailed and required by the fact that the heart must be purified in order to understand the Word; it can only be purified by self-knowledge; and the Word must be received for one to be able to undertake purification of the heart and realize self-knowledge. There is then a circular relation between self-knowledge, knowledge of the truth, and care of the self. If you want to be saved you must accept the truth given in the Text and manifested in Revelation.

(Foucault, 2005: 255)

This is what constitutes subjectivity, phenomenon that cannot be recognized in the Greek *bios* (Foucault, 2019: 252–53). It is the unfolding of the *bios* that anchors reflection on the good life, reasonable life, or truthful life. But the creation of subjectivity as the correlation of the Truth received in Revelation of the Text renders the whole ethics of *bios* unrecognizable. As Foucault goes on to point out, this new notion of truth introduces a peculiar circularity:

However, you cannot know this truth unless you take care of yourself in the form of the purifying knowledge (*connaissance*) of the heart. On the other hand, this purifying knowledge of yourself by yourself is only possible on condition of a prior fundamental relationship to the truth of the Text and Revelation. This circularity is, I think, one of the fundamental points of the relations between the care of the self and knowledge of the self in Christianity. In Christianity, self-knowledge is arrived at through techniques whose essential function is to dispel internal illusions, to recognize the temptations that arise within the soul and the heart, and also to thwart the seductions to which we may be victims. And this is all accomplished by a method for deciphering

the secret processes and movements that unfold within the soul and whose origin, aim and form must be grasped. An exegesis of the self is required. Turning around the self in Christianity is essentially and fundamentally to renounce the self. Therefore, in Christianity we have a scheme of the relation between knowledge and the care of the self that hinges on three points: 1) circularity between truth of the Text and self-knowledge; 2) an exegetical method for self-knowledge; 3) the objective of self-renunciation.

(Foucault, 2005: 255–56)

I had remarked in the beginning that Foucault does not ever get round to asking why theology attacks spirituality. This extended analysis is one place where we can begin to speculate what might be his answer to that question. There is little doubt that in the last decade of his life, Foucault's research focused on highlighting the radical difference between Christianity and the Hellenic-Romanic thought. Truth, of course, is at the heart of what he uncovers. With Christianity, there emerges a conception of truth totally at odds with the conception that had organized the "care of the self" culture. If self-knowledge in the latter was access to a reality that was not the object of knowing, in Christianity, knowing (*connaissance*) is entirely and exclusively intellectual or theoretical. The examination of conscience, for example, is a knowing of the kind that Christianity brings into being, as is the endless decipherment of the self as an object, a domain. When Christianity begins to attack domains like economics and erotics that were integrated into the conditions of spirituality as part of the access to truth, those domains get opened up for knowing through the rational reflection of theology. A peculiar combination of rationality and morality begins looking for "truths" in these domains, truths that allegedly provide the subject with the knowledge about how he ought to act or what he ought to avoid. This combination of rationality and morality is what I have termed "normativization," the unique contribution of Christianity. If problematization was the route that the many spiritual movements used to seek access to truth, Christianity fashions normativization as the route for the salvation of souls.<sup>3</sup>

It is this normativization that provides the subject-matter for the so-called secular knowledges, such as psychiatry, criminology, and the moral sciences. Thus, Foucault's latter investigation into the conception of truth and knowing that Christianity develops clarifies the questions with which his earlier investigation into madness, delinquency, and sexuality were concerned. More importantly, it provides us with a novel hypothesis about how we need to understand the process of secularization. Secularization is usually thought of as a process which registers the decline of religion or, what is the same thing, liberation from religious thinking (some even reviving the Weberian thesis of disenchantment as part of it). If, however, we focus on the Truth of Revelation in the Text and see the effects of the truths that subsequent normativization process generates we begin to understand secularization very differently.

What that focus makes us think about is how secularization continues in an intensified fashion the religious attempt to transform access to truth into knowing truth(s). It is important to grasp what the transformation does to the sociality of the golden age of the care of the self. That sociality was richly articulated because it embodied the learning that the “care of the self” culture produced through its diverse explorations of condition of spirituality. Secularization strips sociality of that cultural learning. What Christianity as religion creates is a religious-secular world; secularization is, if you like, another face or garb of religion. The secular may once have contrasted with the religious—for example, when Christianity begins to oppose itself to the entirely secular pursuit of the spiritual knowledge in the Hellenistic-Roman culture. In the Roman world, the secular begins to contract, and eventually, as the process of the Christianization of the Roman world is completed, the secular world gets absorbed within the religious world (MacMullen, 1984; Markus, 1990; Balagangadhara, 1994). The distinction between religious and secular, then, is a distinction drawn within religion. The distinctions between man and citizen, civil society and political society presuppose theology for their intelligibility. The higher, universal interest of man is to be embodied in the state; the base, particular passion is pursued in civil society. Marx unerringly pins this secular, liberal doctrine that enshrines the secular state as the ultimate human achievement for what it truly is: namely, secularized theology. *Secularism* would then be the way the secular, that is, the truly religious, state deals with what it construes to be religions.<sup>4</sup>

### Fetishism through Genealogy

That is indeed the claim Marx makes in his “On the Jewish Question.” Most commentators of that text and of the early Marx have found Marx’s claim puzzling (Leopold, 2007). But now that we have the historical, theoretical, and above all, the spiritual presupposition for understanding that remark in place, we will be in a position not only to appreciate the full force of Marx’s characterization of the secular state but also to give a different dimension to his understanding of alienation and fetishism. Let me quickly redraw the picture necessary for supporting my claim from the discussion of Foucault above. What I aim to do is something far more complicated than the usual sketching of the intellectual context; I’m staging this encounter between Marx and Foucault by seeking an alignment of their problems through their own conceptual story. The meta-theory I sketched in Chapter 1 provides the framework for that encounter.

Let us ask how European sociality, as Foucault’s genealogy makes us sketch it, looked to Marx who was fashioning his own concepts to understand it. It is important that this move is understood in the right way in order to grasp the significance of the argument I am building. I am not only eschewing the standard or default way of situating a thinker in his/her time; I am also steering clear of the way Marxist scholarship has tended to look at the early

and late Marx. I do not have the space here to explain why that is necessary or how I see that scholarship; the theoretical yield, I am hoping, is enough of a justification. My strategy amounts to the suggestion that Marx's critique needs to be situated within Foucault's genealogy of the Western normativizing culture. From Foucault, we have a two-fold description of the secularization of the West. There is the disappearance, or at any rate, subjugation of spiritual knowledge which leaves the domains of sociality stripped of the cultural leaning; the latter process is captured through the normativization of domains such as economy, polity, and erotics. The same process also throws light on another significant phenomenon: philosophically, the subject as such becomes capable of truth:

The subject only has to be what he is for him to have access in knowledge (*connaissance*) to the truth that is open to him through his own structure as subject. It seems to me this is very clear in Descartes, with, if you like, the supplementary twist in Kant, which consists in saying that what we cannot know is precisely the structure itself of the knowing subject, which means that we cannot know the subject. Consequently, the idea of a certain spiritual transformation of the subject, which finally gives him access to something to which precisely he does not have access at the moment, is chimerical and paradoxical. So the liquidation of what could be called the condition of spirituality for access to the truth is produced with Descartes and Kant; Kant and Descartes seem to me to be the two major moments.

(Foucault, 2005: 190)

That liquidation process, I am arguing, while it produced a different conception of truth and the subject, also effected a reduction of the complex articulation of sociality that the "practice of the self" culture had produced. Now, Foucault hints that the condition of spirituality resurfaces in the revolutionary movements of the 19th century and in the thought of Hegel and Marx (and also Freud). But this is in some sense a distorted attempt to reunite conditions of spirituality and truth. It is distorted because the transformation of the access to truth into autonomous development of truth(s) is retained intact or at any rate not seriously interrupted. Hegel's phenomenological account of the movement of consciousness and self-consciousness into absolute knowledge would be a good or paradigmatic example. His account of family, ethical life, and the state is conceptually rich and nuanced, but it still presupposes the normativized stripping of the sociality in these domains. Marx in a way recognizes this but his critique too misdiagnoses the problem as one of offering a materialist account in place of the idealist dialectic of concepts. (His demand therefore for an account of practice and sensuous activity that is as rich as the Hegelian account of concept formation.) The early Marx's concept of alienation and the late Marx's theory of fetishism (reification of social relationships and personification of things) both

obliquely register the process that has created a sociality separated from the cultural learning that had articulated it. The analogy that Marx so frequently and insistently draws between capitalism and Christianity shows that somewhere in his theorizing he is glimpsing a pattern, a link that eludes the explicit conceptual framework. That is the source of the philosophically uncertain status of alienation in his early work. While it seems to indicate something more than the physical separation of the product of labor, there was no conceptual room in Marx to see it as an expression of the experiential or spiritual condition, an experience-occluding structure. In the later theory of fetishism, we have one of the most profound understandings of the autonomization of the reified social relationship and yet Marx fails to realize that his own theory of class and the productive forces succumbs to that process. This may seem enigmatic only if we fail to see that “class” itself is a product of normativization, one of the ontologically peculiar entities. Although in Foucault’s mature work, “sexuality” is the fully worked out example of a normativized entity (see Chapter 1), he had opened up other inquiries which we can retrospectively see as an attempt to demonstrate how “race,” “nation,” and “class” too emerge as a product of normativization (Foucault, 2003). The implication is clear: “class” cannot be a theoretical term that can be used in social scientific explanation everywhere in the world.

From Foucault’s genealogy, we have been able to extract a picture of how culture and sociality are inter-related: in that picture, culture as learning enables sociality and the latter in its turn sustains the former. That was what produced the long summer of the Hellenistic-Roman model of the care of the self. Christianity as religion and capitalism both separate the two and tend to destroy cultural learning. Alienation as a certain kind of experience expresses not the separation of the objectification of labor when the latter becomes labor-power; instead, it is the separation of action, any action, from the condition of spirituality. Culture, as I said, enables the social and the social sustains the cultural. When culture is separated from the social, the latter is poised for reification in many ways. In Foucault’s account, “race,” “class,” and the “nation” are prime examples of the process of reification (Foucault, 2003): the “truth” of blood and history producing the nation, the “truth” of interest producing class. Although I have deliberately switched to the Marxian term “reification” to render the link transparent and poignant, what creates this condition of sociality is the process that Foucault abstractly characterized as the autonomization of a certain conception of knowing and the forging of the link between truth and subjectivity. Once the domains that were the conditions of application of the care of the self were destroyed, sociality comes under the purview of truths that the secular human sciences begin to uncover. That process, the one I am calling secularization, transforms the practical domains, domains that had come under the ambit of the condition of spirituality, into spheres that appear autonomous. Thus, practical/ethical sphere of erotics/economy/dietetics is unrecognizable in the domain of “sexuality” (Foucault, 1985), whose truths begin to form the subjects; the problematic of

self-governance and government of other morphs into the pastoral project of the welfare state, transforming people into normed subjects or citizens. The transformation involved mediating “norm” and “truth” into what we now recognize as “history” in a process that was “complex, continuous and paradoxical,” and necessarily brought about “stupefying violence against themselves as well as against others” (Foucault, 2002: 303).<sup>5</sup> This, I suggested earlier, is a religious-secular world.

Marx is indeed recognizing that world when he says that the truly Christian state is the secular state and not the theocratic state. The state, in the theological picture, had always laid claim to be the true vicar of Christ, a claim that was at the heart of the prolonged church-state conflict. In the secular-religious world, the state and politics come to represent the “higher” aspiration of the subject as citizen, his “lower” or base aspirations being confined to civil society. The secular state deals with Judaism politically, by making it part of civil society, hence belonging to the baser side (Marx, 1975: 222). Consistent with this stance, Marx seeks liberation from politics itself, for after all politics, in this religious-secular world, is a form of pastoral power (to switch to Foucault’s terminology). For Marx, emancipation then is emancipation from the secular-religious world. It is this picture that lies behind the recurring analogy between Christianity as religion and capitalism in Marx’s work (both early and late). Here is an example where the analogy is so drawn that something more than an analogy is straining to break through:

Therefore the supporters of the monetary and mercantile system, who look upon private property as a purely objective being of man, appear as fetish-worshippers, as Catholics, to this enlightened political economy, which has revealed—within the system of private property—the subjective essence of wealth. Engels was therefore right to call Adam Smith the Luther of political economy. Just as Luther recognized religion and faith as the essence of the external world and in consequence confronted Catholic paganism; just as he transcended external religiosity by making religiosity the inner essence of man; just as he negated the priest as something separate and apart from layman by transforming the priest into the heart of the layman; so wealth as something outside man and independent of him—and therefore only to be acquired and maintained externally—is abolished [*aufgehoben*]. I.e., its *external and mindless objectivity* is abolished inasmuch as private property is embodied in man himself and man himself is recognized as its essence—but this brings man himself into the province of private property, just as Luther brought him into the province of religion.<sup>6</sup>

(Marx, 1975: 342; emphasis original)

The image of the priest in every layman captures not only what Protestantism accomplishes but as an image also throws light on the normed/norming citizen of the secular/religious republic, in so far as the priestliness consists in the

assumption of the normative attitude. What this passage from Marx is straining to articulate is that the creation of the province of religion and the province of private property in which the essence of man as the subject of labor, of sexuality, of madness, of delinquency is lodged, that creation may not be two distinct processes. It is better regarded as two different descriptions of the same process.

### Spirituality as Experiential Knowledge

Without an explicit conception of spiritual knowledge, which as Foucault says was driven underground by this time, Marx can only articulate the condition of spirituality by succumbing to the reification of the social. In his case, it turned out to be class. The class politics of the proletariat, he thought, will allow it to transform itself and the sociality that created it. As he was unable to explicitly theorize either alienation or, later, fetishism as the expression of the loss of the condition of spirituality, he could only think of combining intellectual knowledge and reified sociality as an alternative to the religious-capitalist world. As we look back on the tragic results of that experiment in the last century, the pressing question is how else to rediscover the conditions of spirituality and the access to truth in a world whose sociality seems insulated from any cultural learning that may be capable of such a rediscovery? That seems to me at the heart of Foucault's later lectures from which I have generously drawn. And yet, he does not explicitly ask why religion/theology is hostile to spiritual knowledge. By way of a conclusion, let me return to that question.

It may be that Foucault takes himself to have answered that question in so far as his discussion of how truth as it figures in the conception of access to truth is radically different from the truth in the subject capable of truth, explicitly talks about the "liquidation" of the condition of spirituality by the dominance of the latter conception. This is entirely right since Foucault associates the emergence of the epistemic concept of truth with Christianity. What he fails to do, however, is to explicitly conceptualize this conception of truth as what distinguishes (Christianity as) religion. He often slips into categorizing the "care of the self" schools or groups as religious. The problem here is not simply one of classification. The failure to distinguish religion from those practicing the care of the self has the disastrous consequence of ignoring one of the major ways in which the secular-religious world would deal with those groups pursuing the conditions of spirituality, namely by construing them as (false) religions. This may not of course be a problem in contemporary Europe (where the "care of the self" groups have disappeared) except in a marginal way, even though early Christianity did indeed deal with the pagan practices by casting them as rival or false religions. But in the non-Western world like India which has been brought into the province of the secular-religious world through colonialism, the way the state deals with traditions of experiential knowledge is reminiscent of Marx's description of

how the secular-religious state would deal with the Jewish question. So, there is the obvious danger of how the secular-religious world may use familiar strategies of normativization to liquidate surviving traditions of spirituality, if they have not already done so.<sup>7</sup>

If, however, spirituality is knowledge, what I have been calling experiential knowledge, then the issue cannot be only one of resistance and preservation. Are there new ways of inter-articulating cultural knowledge and sociality? I have been using the term cultural learning whenever I have spoken of spiritual or experiential knowledge. The reason for that should have been obvious. That learning is intrinsically linked to happiness. As Foucault too makes clear in his rich reconstructions of the “care of the self” culture, the conditions of spirituality and access to truth have no one path. There are innumerable ways and heuristics to discover or invent to seek access to truth which brings about transformation in the subject, brings about happiness. Consequently, the sociality articulated by that cultural learning too tends to be richly layered and pluralized. When, therefore, the religious-secular world of capitalism has begun to strip sociality of all cultural learning, the urgent question for both practical-spiritual knowledge and intellectual knowledge is: how can we articulate new cultural learnings that find expression in the articulation of sociality itself? Perhaps both critique and genealogy will be of service in clarifying what that question demands.

## Notes

- 1 Foucault is emphatic about this point: “While having trouble with the word and putting it in inverted commas, I think we can say that from the Hellenistic and Roman period we see a real development of the ‘culture’ of the self. I don’t want to use the word culture in a sense that is too loose and I will say that we can speak of culture on a number of conditions. First, when there is a set of values with a minimum degree of coordination, subordination, and hierarchy. We can speak of culture when a second condition is satisfied, which is that these values are given both as universal but also as only accessible to a few. A third condition for being able to speak of culture is that a number of precise and regular forms of conduct are necessary for individuals to be able to reach these values. Even more than this, effort and sacrifice is required. In short, to have access to these values you must be able to devote your whole life to them. Finally, the fourth condition for being able to talk about culture is that access to these values is conditional upon more or less regular techniques and procedures that have been developed, validated, transmitted, and taught, and that are also associated with a whole set of notions, concepts, and theories etc.: with a field of knowledge (*savoir*)” (Foucault, 2005: 179). What we see in that work is how the “culture of self” *enables* the sociality of the period, which in turn *sustains* the care of the self or experiential knowledge to flourish. My own formulation of the relationship between culture and sociality owes much to an exchange with Balagangadhara on a series of insightful notes he produced to clarify his proposal to look at culture as a configuration of learning (Balagangadhara, 1994).

2 See the section subtitled “Ontologically Peculiar Entities” in Chapter 1.

3 The most difficult problem here is the relationship between truth and norm. Can that be investigated philosophically? It is clear that part of the reason for Foucault’s rejection of philosophy in favor of genealogy has to be that the philosophical

route to that question will lead back to theology. Instead, he thought he could show how the ethical reflections of Greek and Roman schools and their exploration of the condition of spirituality as access to truth had nothing in common with the universally binding property of Christian morality (or its secularized versions) or with the Christian concept of Truth. Whereas the secularized version of Christian morality is relatively easy to track (think of Nietzsche's work), the secularized version of truth has posed a far more difficult challenge. Although Foucault did not always formulate his earlier inquiry as tracking secularization, it was evident when, for example, he discussed the vertical or in-depth Christianization (as distinct from its horizontal spread through proselytization) or welfare state as pastoral form of power; however, once he began his inquiry that produced the volumes on the history of sexuality, it was clear that he was indeed explicitly investigating the relationship between truth and norm as what structures the secularization process. Perhaps the only place where Foucault does explicitly use the term secularization to designate the phenomenon of governmentality is in his lecture "What is Critique" (Foucault, 2007: 44).

- 4 If the direction I am suggesting is persuasive as well as illuminating, we will have a coherent alternative to the current ways of thinking about the secular, secularization, and secularism (which has found expression in a spate of recent books and anthologies, discussed with great fanfare on the website of the American Social Science Research Council).
- 5 It is worth speculating if the power/knowledge thesis of "middle" Foucault was an oblique attempt to grasp the violence that the Protestant Reformation unleashed while intensifying the transformation of the practical world. I think it is the violence generated by this transformation that preoccupies Gandhi and which he seeks to counter with the practice of non-violence (see Chapter 6). How this violence is distinct from and yet coalesces with colonial violence is something that needs deeper understanding (see also Balagangadhara, 2012a: 113–114).
- 6 In *Capital*, the analogy is turned into a relationship of "fitting": "For a society of producers, whose general social relations of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labours into relation with each other as homogeneous human labour, Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e., in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion" (Marx, 1976: 172).
- 7 This is what is taking place in non-European and non-religious context such as India. Concealed just beneath the superficial problem of terminology lies the biggest problem that has gone unnamed. While taking the tolerant policy of saying "let's ignore what people mean by religion as long as we know what they are referring to," we pass over the problem of saying what exactly happens in this move. We repeat the way secular-religious culture (state) treats spiritual tradition by misconstruing them as religions, thereby initiating at least one major way of liquidating them.

## 6 Understanding the “Semblance of Objectivity”

### Critique, Genealogy, and Practition

One has to understand action, inappropriate action, and non-action. The course of action is deep.

—*The Bhagavad Gita* (IV, 17)

Diagnosing the source of the formidable difficulties we face in understanding the practical form of life has been the central concern of both critique and genealogy. If Marxian critique sought to plot the limit of theoretical understanding, genealogy showed how to grasp the cultural transformation of the practical form of life in the West. Both fetishism/reification and normativized domains that create ontologically peculiar entities are products of these transformations. Yet, neither critique nor genealogy succeeds in articulating how to conceive ethical action as the core of practical form of life. Gandhi's insight into ethical action not only enables us to reformulate the theory of fetishism and resist the normativization of action domains, it helps us to radically reconceive politics as setting up of sites of learning.

Our predicament (as depicted in Chapters 3 and 4) is such that we have to interrogate not only the concepts that have come to us from the West and the orientalized concepts of Indian thought but also indirectly the conceptual capacities that we have not paid much attention to but which bear the imprint of a form of life, whose actuality, feasibility, and accessibility are all questions that we have had neither the courage nor the epistemic resources to formulate and confront. So, although my reflections will target critique, genealogy, and ethical action, we will find ourselves entangled in a few more concepts: “life-form,” “form of life,” “social,” “theoretical,” and “practical,” but also the concept of “concept” and “action”; leaning on them alternately to illuminate each and in the process clarify the trajectory embodied in the title. But it will turn out (I hope) that the trajectory is to be thought less in terms of temporal phases than as theoretical and practical possibilities in our conceptual and practical space.

## Critique

I want to propose that the kind of Marxism that gained dominance in India was at odds with (perhaps even destructive of) our practical and non-discursive ways of going about in the world. So is perhaps the more diffuse formation called liberalism. But let me focus on Marxism both because it presents a more structured target and because it still holds out intellectual potential of a certain sort that has a bearing on our life with concepts. This is what we need to think through. Marxism, as a theory embodying a cluster of concepts, rather than providing understanding, as we expect concepts to do, was instead what I would call (following Foucault) a deployment. I have been using the term “deployment” for a certain kind of rationality that develops after reflection is insulated from experience and that uses discourses from different sources (thus: deployment of nationalism, of liberalism, of feminism, and so forth). This will become clear after we have discussed genealogy. For now, it is enough to get the contrast in terms of employing a concept that brings understanding and deploying a concept that perhaps does many things except provide understanding. There are two reasons why Marxism became a deployment in India (elsewhere too, but we will not take up that story here): Marxian politics, which is, in an essential sense, the deployment of his philosophy of history, fed into and intensified the liberal-reform onslaught on Indian “customs,” “traditions,” “religious superstitions,” and so on. I am putting these words under scare-quotes to designate them as targets of the assault; we will need to look into the form of life that makes them, under a different description or frame, into bearers of a form of knowledge, practical knowledge. Marxism as critique was never even glimpsed and has not made its appearance even now.

Did Marxism as critique ever appear anywhere? Well, yes, in Marx’s *Capital*, whose subtitle, as we know, is “A Critique of Political Economy.” It is now commonplace to say that the object of critique is ideology, but this, even if very partially correct, does not provide us with the right characterization of critique.<sup>1</sup> I would like to claim that it is the social which is the indirect object of Marx’s critique. We need to undertake some conceptual labor to say why the social appears as the indirect object of critique. Marx’s idea of critique echoes the critique that inaugurated the tradition of German Idealism, namely, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant sought to determine the limit and scope of pure reason, the forms of thinking of the metaphysical tradition. If the limits of pure reason are not drawn, it will produce “antinomies of reason.” That critique was not something optional in the task of producing a philosophical account of how theoretical (scientific) understanding was possible and how objective knowledge was possible. Marx too saw critique as an essential prerequisite to understanding the entity that had just then emerged as the object of theoretical understanding, namely the social. The common currency—partly, ironically, due to the history of Marxist thought—of this word conceals how little we understand of it (Balagangadhara, 2012b: 90-94). In fact, it can be argued that Marx is the first theorist of the social (in that sense, the first social scientist or social

philosopher, whichever one prefers). From the *Manuscripts of 1844* (written in his twenties) to *Capital*, Marx is struggling to find ways to conceptualize the social. In the former, we find extraordinarily brilliant, if often obscurely formulated, insight into how the nexus of nature and the social—species essence and social essence—could be thought in the face of the estrangements of the practical spheres that capitalism was producing. Whether as a species being or as a social being, Marx grasps man as bearer of both a life-form and a practice or form of life: “the self-mediated being of nature and of man” (Marx, 1975: 356). While some of the formulations he uses to express that unity seem purely verbal, there is no denying either the effort to think through what is theoretical and what is practical or the straining for a stance that grasps the social in the midst of all the diremptions caused by private property. Thus: “The human essence of nature exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist for him as a bond with other men...Only here does it exist as the basis of his own human existence” (Marx, 1975: 349). But the social is as yet available to universal consciousness only “in my theoretical existence as a social being” (Marx, 1975: 350). As long as there is possession, even the senses cannot flourish since their use and enjoyment is egoistic and their relationship to their respective mode of disclosing their objects is utility. Although, already along with this profound insight into the deeply deforming effect of private property, the productivist, teleologizing aspect of Marx makes its first appearance, there is also astonishingly the hint of a conception of communism as what is conceivable as an ever-present possibility of the social. What is important for our purposes, however, is that all through his struggle to conceptualize the nexus between nature and the social, Marx is in fact also working out his idea of the critique. That is to say, he is attempting to grasp the social through the different forms of thought—political economy, philosophy, political theory—that is trying to understand the different estranged spheres. The question for Marx, the question that propelled him toward formulating the idea of critique is: when does understanding achieved by an inquiry or discipline (such as political economy) cease to be understanding?

Marx’s philosophical struggle to articulate the idea of critique through his discussion of the social and his conception of the theoretical and practical attitude culminates in the famous *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx, 1975: 421–23). I have selected for discussion those theses that express, admittedly in a very condensed and often cryptic formulation, the result of a new, properly materialist conception of thought, action, and practice:

- I The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. Hence, in *The Essence of Christianity*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-Judaical manifestation. Hence, he does not grasp the significance of “revolutionary,” of “practical-critical,” activity.

- II The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth—i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.
- III Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled: 1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to pre-suppose an abstract, isolated, human individual. 2. Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as “genus,” as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.<sup>2</sup>

These three are undoubtedly the most complex of Marx’s theses, not only because of his attempt to harness the active side of idealism to formulate a conception of action that is in itself critical and reflective, “practical-critical” or simply *praxis*, but because he is almost unwittingly putting his finger on a transformation in thought—that is, thought undergoing a fundamental modification—that is underway in Europe just then. With Hegel’s radical reformulation of the philosophical task, theoretical attitude had attained a new intellectual dimension precisely by attempting to secure the objectivity of different spheres of the *Geist*—nature, mind, art, ethics, the state—through their *logical forms* (in the distinctive sense Hegel gives to logic). Marx obviously acknowledges the novelty and scope of this project—the active side of which he wishes to bring to the new conception of action and practice he is trying to articulate.

Without analyzing each thesis in detail, we can nonetheless notice that the new materialism must combine a reconstituted idealism—the active, constitutive dimension of thought must shape how practice is conceived—with a materialism that sheds its narrow conception of activity and practice to conceive of thought itself as bearer of action and practice. The new materialism cannot think of “essence” as a dumb generality that externally unites individuals. How else to think the “genus” and “species” of thought and action, individual and social, nature and human nature? How to unite, in the 1844 language, the human science of nature and natural science of the human? When we think of a living thing, we already think it as a bearer of a life-form and this thought, the predication I use to describe the living thing, shows that it is an active, practical, and *a priori* thought, not based on abstracting from

the teaming multitude of life.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, action and practice and the expressions and predication that are part of them too cannot be thought of as deriving from my needs, desires, and interests—the instrumental conception of practice; they too are bearers of forms of life. The categorial structures we use, the modes of predication we employ testify that our understanding of “life forms” or “Nature” and the “form of life” or the “social” is active, practical, and *a priori* (actually what is practical appears *a priori* if looked from the theoretical standpoint, which, as Marx reminds us, is not the only standpoint). The concepts we use imply a category of being, but being and practice are not only categorial or propositional, they are “sensuous” too. How to capture the sensuous action of thought? While it seems less difficult to conceive of the being of categories, it seems particularly difficult to grasp the intelligence and intelligibility of practices. How to think of action-knowledge other than as knowledge about actions? And how to unite the two reworked sides: idealist and materialist? Marx is straining toward a notion of the social that can deliver that nexus (the new materialism which could equally well be thought of as the new idealism). Does Marx succeed? I don’t think he does and he never again achieves or even attempts the kind of taut, gnomic, sweepingly visionary and yet deeply insightful meta-philosophical reflection. In fact, even in the Theses, the tension we observe in the first few theses, which are striving self-consciously to articulate a powerful new insight, collapses in a formulation that again makes the social into an inert and dumb generality when he says that the religious sentiment is a product of the social. In this formulation, which a little later becomes his theory of ideology, even the active side of thought that the old idealism had achieved is given up, let alone the reconstituted idealism that the first thesis was calling for. Thus, the next thesis leaves us ambivalent: that all social life is essentially practical is expressing a great insight and yet the next sentence about how practice and the comprehension of practice provides rational solution to theoretical mysteries leaves it indeterminate how we are to see the relationship between the two (the remark in Thesis IV about the real family being the secret of the holy family and the need for abolishing the former in theory and practice leaves one feeling more than a bit uneasy). So, thought and action, concepts and practices fall back into their former one-sided existence.

Let me draw out the implication of my remarks above for understanding the idea of critique in Marx. We can characterize it as a critique of theoretical reason/attitude/ knowledge. As our discussion of Kant should have made clear, what this entails is not a negation or rejection of theoretical knowledge, but precisely a way to develop an account of what a theoretical understanding of the social would be like, and when that understanding ceases to be understanding and turns into something else. This is the hardest part to get hold of. Our temptation here would be to ask the following question: When does understanding turn into “ideology” such that we can characterize the task of critique as specifying, in any given situation, the conditions which turn a theory into ideology? This is correct, as far as it goes, but it does not

go very far or deep. Let's work with Marx's most developed and at least partially successful example, namely his critique of political economy. The discourse of political economy (moral science, political philosophy) could be regarded as theorizing the practical domain of activities that we call economic (actions: peasants tilling land, miners in tunnels, women in sweatshops, artist before a canvas?). Thus, we have Adam Smith's "division of labour" and Ricardo's theory of value contributing to our understanding of how the economy works. But at the same time, political economy has never once asked how objects assume the commodity form and hence takes for granted money and capital, which, as Marx teaches us, are already hidden in the commodity form itself. That an apparently simple thing like a commodity displays "metaphysical subtleties" and "theological niceties" has to do with what Marx called "the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities." Why inseparable? Because it "arises from the peculiar *social* character of the labour which produces them" (Marx, 1976: 165; emphasis added). Sociality begins to appear "as material (*dinglich*) relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx, 1976: 166). Now political economy not only does not penetrate this "semblance of objectivity" (Marx, 1976: 167), it reflects this state of affairs. But that itself does not make it ideology. It is just a theoretical failure and we surely do not want to consider all failed theories as ideologies! The problem here is that Marx's own treatment of the thought structures and material practices remain separate, only externally joined, like the old idealism and old materialism simply opposed or juxtaposed. It is as though Marx's own thought succumbs to the fetishism he is theorizing. Here is what he says about one of the "thought structures" that "most fit" the relations of production:

For a society of producers, whose general social relations of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labour into relation with each other as homogeneous human labour, Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e., in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion.

(Marx, 1976: 172)

This fitting is entirely obscure. Now, various elements of what we have been calling thought structures had to be part of the *practice* of independent producers meeting to exchange their products as value, namely the idea and practice of contract. It would be odd to describe the idea of contract or the idea of equal exchange—without which there would not have been the phenomenon of fetishism—as "most fitting." My point is not that therefore these are ideologies. Rather these thought structures cannot be separated from the material phenomenon that renders the social opaque or oblique (they together

form the *explanandum*). If the analysis of the secret of the value-form is a successful instance of Marx’s theory of the social—tracking or conceptualizing the nexus of the natural and the social in its most oblique existence—there is a counter-part to that task that Marx needs to undertake in order to give us an adequate and new materialist understanding of the reified form of life (if it is one) we find ourselves in. In the same way as reification is objective or has a “semblance of objectivity” and yet subsists on the social that it renders opaque and oblique, a conjoined account of the subject-form that similarly *subsists on the practical form of life that it nevertheless renders invisible* has to be produced to complete our understanding of the reified or fetishized semblance of a form of life that capitalism is. The subject as the bearer of rights and interests, the social as the fetishized object-mediated relationships, nature as utility go together to form this semblance as a form of life. The place for understanding ideology would be within this conjoined picture of commodity form and subject-form. No thought structure—philosophical, literary, or law—is by itself ideological. Marxist thought has paid a heavy price for settling for a notion of materialism that ends up reducing the “materiality” of thought structures to “ideology.” As we will see in the concluding chapter, it is essential to regard “logical space” and “practical space” as genuine material processes, whose integrity remains uncontaminated by ideologies.

In Thesis X, Marx had asserted: “The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or *social humanity*”<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added). Standpoint is the right term, since what is involved is the theoretical ability to conceptualize the social. But the social as Marx so emphatically and insightfully insisted in the Theses is practical: “All social life is essentially *practical*” (emphasis in the original), says Thesis VIII. The domain of economics is eminently a practical domain. In fact, the practical is, as it were, the genus of which ethics, economics, erotics, dietetics, etc. could be seen as species. How is it then that one domain, *oikonomia*, or economics attained such dominance, even subordinating or colonizing the others? Marx’s theory of the social—elaborated as a critique of political economy—gives a logical reconstruction of the process that makes possible the emergence of the value-form or commodity/money/capital. Marx’s critique evolves through his early concern to validate and reanimate the practical, actional dimension of the social in the face of what the young Marx regards as the distortion it is undergoing as a result of the generalized theoretical attitude under the reign of private property, to his demonstration in *Capital* of the “semblance of objectivity” and the “necromancy” that the social is forced to generate under capitalism. The social, therefore, is the indirect object of Marx’s critique. The critique seeks to explain the “semblance” in order to access the true objectivity, the practice that the Theses had sought. As Marx makes clear, the critique would not make the semblance vanish; it would, however, enable us to grasp the genuine practical-critical activity that capitalist sociality nevertheless prevents us from experiencing. But Marx has no

account of how the domain of economy with its necromancy emerges. That Marx does not even raise this question has to do in part with his philosophy of history (the dialectic of social relations and productive forces) and his theory of ideology. In fact, his theory of ideology could be seen as contributing to the generalized theoretical attitude the young Marx was critical of: seeing all discursive or linguistic expressions as potential ideologies has the effect of returning practice to its degraded status that the Thesis had accused Feuerbach of doing. So, if capitalism deprives practical activity its reflectiveness, unity, and objectivity, Marx’s theory of ideology (when conjoined with his philosophy of history) deprives itself of the resources to raise questions about the transformation of the practical domains.

The central claim I wish to advance here is that even when damaged, even when it is framed out and is not generating its own reflections to nurture and elaborate the practices, even then, the practical form of life is what sustains objectivity. The young Marx glimpsed that when he spoke of species essence and sociality. As he movingly put it, even our senses do not flourish under private property because it denies the deep unity between nature and the social that makes possible the practical form of life. The later Marx elaborated that insight when he theorized fetishism of commodities (reification/personification). His theorization, however, had accepted the categories of political economy at a deeper level than his own critique had managed to grasp. If we take the theoretical attitude that the early Marx is so concerned to delimit as the search for properties in the world, political economy as a newly emergent theoretical inquiry turns action into “labor” which becomes a property of human beings. Or, rather, human beings become carriers or embodiments of abstract human labor. Critique, therefore, needs genealogy to map how the practical domains have got transformed in the West. If labor as a category of political economy already frames out action,<sup>5</sup> we could hypothesize that this is a pattern involving action and practice that we are likely to encounter in other domains too.

### Genealogy

Marx’s near contemporary Nietzsche set up Christian morality as the target of genealogy. Like Marx identified the social as what needed theoretical understanding through a critique of political economy and other bourgeois discourses of quasi-theoretical nature, Nietzsche identified morality as a genuinely new phenomenon, to be understood through a method he termed genealogy. It embodied a kind of will to know (the theoretical attitude that Marx criticized) that was indeed proving destructive of experience itself. While in Nietzsche this insight does not always attain full clarity in the vast and often very unsystematic aphorisms, Michel Foucault has turned that insight into a productive hypothesis for his genealogical investigations into how normativization<sup>6</sup> transforms different domains of practical life. Starting with his genealogy of “sexuality” and going on to politics, history, and governmentality,

Foucault at the time of his premature death—and it is one death one wishes had occurred much later—was trying to find a genealogical route to the very domain Marx had theorized, namely the economy. Each domain offers as it were a matrix of knowledge, action, and predication. Take dietetics, whose end would be health, but my participation in that matrix involves self-knowledge, relationship to nature, and action with others. Let me use Foucault’s own beautiful illustration which gets hold of the lineaments of the form of life so vividly. It is Marcus Aurelius’ letter to his friend, teacher, and perhaps lover, Fronto:

We are well. I slept little due to being a bit feverish, which now seems to have subsided. So, I spent the time, from eleven at night until five in the morning, reading some Cato’s Agriculture and also in writing: happily, less than yesterday. After paying my respects to my father, I relieved my throat, I will not say by gargling—though the word *gargarisso* is, I believe, found in Novius and elsewhere—but by swallowing honey water as far as the gullet and ejecting it again. After easing my throat, I went off to my father and attended him at a sacrifice. Then we went to luncheon. What do you think I ate? A little bread, though I saw others devouring oysters, beans, onions and fat sardines. We then worked on the grape harvest, building up a good sweat and shouting out loud... After six o’ clock we came home. I studied a little and that to no purpose. Then I had a long chat with my little mother as she sat on the bed... While we were chatting in this way and disputing which of us two loved one or other of you two the better [...whether Marcus Aurelius loved Fronto more than his mother loved Gratia, Fronto’s daughter; M.F.], the gong sounded, announcing that my father had gone to his bath. So we had supper after we had bathed in the oil press room...and enjoyed hearing the cheerful banter of the villagers. After coming back, before turning on my side to sleep, I go through my task and give my dearest of masters an account of the day’s doings. This master whom I would like, even at the cost of my health and physical well-being, desire and miss even more than I do. Good health, dear Fronto, you who are my love, my delight. I love you.

(Cited in Foucault, 2005: 158)

So, we find, as though the letter was written to exemplify them, the three domains: dietetics, economics, and erotics, “three major domains,” as Foucault puts it, “in which the practice of the self is actualized in this period with, as we see, constant cross-referencing from one to the other” (Foucault, 2005: 161). One inhabits the domains successively or simultaneously or even overlappingly. That is to say, there is a kind of integratedness to them that is a result of the fact that they “appear as domains of application for the practice of the self” (Foucault, 2005: 162). Ethics as problematization takes shape in these domains. Another way of putting it would be to see how action in these

domains are supported and clarified by reflection in an integrated way: problematization, we could say, completes action into experience. According to Foucault's later works, "the care of the self" form of life is characterized by such problematizations, whether that takes place in the sociality elaborated by the philosophical schools that are so central to the Greek culture or in the sociality structured by the reflective familial milieu that we find in the Roman period.

But these domains, these problematizations, and these actions begin to be broken down, re-bundled, or transformed in a peculiar way with the emergence and spread of Christianity. The extraordinarily detailed genealogical picture of the ancient world that Foucault draws is meant to highlight the later emergence of domains such as sexuality, economy, and politics that are ontologically peculiar in that they distort experience by insulating it from reflection. Normativization begins to supplant problematization. The practical domains that Foucault reconstructs had not known of norm or the notion of truth that Christianity brings in. The latter, however, begins to corrode the practices in these domains by insinuating that they fail to meet a norm. The next question is why do these practices fail to meet the norm? The answer that begins to take shape is: "sexuality." ("Why is he a sinner?" "It's his sexuality.") But what is sexuality?—the proliferation begins, from confession, to theology to psychoanalysis and later to a whole variety of discourses that Foucault calls *scientia sexualis*. The properties these "theories" find or extract are supposed to provide the "truth." Sexuality, therefore, becomes the vehicle of truth, which yields more and more discourse. Action is refracted, reified in properties, and made to produce discourse, which expresses "truth." So, "sex" becomes a vehicle of "truth," resulting in "sexuality." In contrast, the erotic domain, in *Ars Erotica*, has, let us say, the Tantric teacher initiate or teach the disciple with the process ending in experience (truth, in another sense). So, the action in this domain could lean on many other domains for enhancing experience or attaining wisdom. So, schematically: *Scientia Sexualis: Truth → Sex → Discourse*. In *Ars Erotica*: *Acts → Initiation → Experience* (Foucault, 1980: 57-58).<sup>7</sup>

What about economy? How do *oikos* and *oikonomia* get transformed? The process is similar to what we observed in "sexuality": if the latter involved veridiction of desire, the economy as a separate reality, "a field of intervention," emerges through the veridiction of interest. Is there a *Scientia Governmentalis* that enables the veridiction? Pre-eminently political economy, but the literature on arts of government too which concerns itself with how to deal with the "imbrication" of men with things, how to "dispose" of things (Foucault, 1991). The result is that:

Politics and Economy are not things that exist, or errors or illusions, or ideologies. They are things that do not exist and yet which are inscribed in reality and fall under a regime of truth dividing the true and false.<sup>8</sup>

(Foucault, 2008: 20)

In the same way as “sexuality” and *scientia sexualis* had both a distinctly theological and secularized phases or dimensions—the concupiscence of the flesh, confession, prohibitions of this and that—governmentality too had discourses which came from theology (Christian pastoral, law-sovereignty model), advice to the prince literature, police material and, of course, economics and liberalism. If “sexuality” becomes the site of veridiction of “desire,” the veridiction of “interest” and “utility” takes place in the “market.” *Oikos* or family is transformed from being a model into an instrument. The target of this re-centered economy is the “population.” The new domain of economy and politics use the earlier entities such as law as “tactics.” We always had a sense that economics is not a science, but Foucault’s work (especially when properly combined with Marx’s critique of political economy) shows why it cannot be a science, or can only be a science like *scientia sexualis*. It is really a technology to manipulate the “imbrication of men and things.” There is an interesting parallel to be drawn: after discussing the contrast between *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica*, Foucault raises the disturbingly ironic question about whether we might consider the former as the contemporary West’s *ars erotica*. We can ask, far more sharply and ironically, whether pornography is the *ars erotica* of the domain populated by *scientia sexualis*? Correspondingly, Foucault makes a deliberate attempt to read liberalism as a practice of governmentality. He is forcing us to confront the question: What kind of practice is that which has, as it were, “scientized” the practical domain? We can draw out the parallel: does liberalism stand to the practical domain of politics (the government of self and others elaborated in “the care-of-the-self” model) as pornography stands to the domain of *scientia sexualis*? The scheme could be mapped thus: there is the practical domain: erotics, *oikos*, and governance; it gets transformed or normed into a “theoretical” or “scientized” domain: sexuality, economy, and politics. The practical domain, however, refuses to go away, but gets incorporated in a deformed way in the “scientized” domain and finds expression in the “practice” of pornography, liberalism, and economics. I think something like this scheme is what emerges from the incomplete later works of Foucault; and it is the template that helps us get hold of the different layers of secularization unfolding before us and enveloping us. (What the leftists characterize as “neo-liberalism” simply fails to grasp the layered complexity of the dynamic of secularization that is our shared predicament.)

With normativization, then, what is transformed, subjugated, and rendered invisible is the whole practical domain of practices and the reflections that support and nourish them. This raises many theoretical and historical questions, in particular about the nature of Christianity as religion and its relationship to truth and norm and about the kind of inquiry that genealogy claims to be. My central claim has been that Christianity as a religion secularizes itself through normativizing domains of practical life. That is really the only way to understand the process of secularization in the West, its entwinement with colonization and its present forms. Seen in this light, Foucault’s

work has a great deal to tell us not only about the secularization of Western culture but about secularization as an on-going process. Thus, my interpretation of Foucault's work is aimed at showing how he manages to demarcate domains of normativity for genealogical analysis. The seemingly disparate inquiries he was pursuing into governmentality in early modern Europe and into truth-telling and spiritual knowledge—themes of self-government in another sense (the sense in which swaraj is used in Gandhi) in ancient Greek and Roman cultures—were united by his concern to show that the domain of modern politics and economy too are normativized.

My claim has been that genealogy is the appropriate mode of inquiry when we are confronted with a normativized domain. At a very abstract level: a domain gets normativized when theoretical knowledge seeks to submerge, subjugate, and even at the limit, substitute itself for practical knowledge. What theory is involved? The ur-theory: theology.<sup>9</sup> The early Marx had sensed the peculiarity of this theoretical attitude, and the later Marx had given us a conceptualization of the domain that resulted from that attitude, namely, fetishism of commodities. If we combine the early Marx's portrayal of secularization<sup>10</sup>—civil society as embodying the “base interest” of commodity owners, the secular state (which is the truly Christian state) as embodying the higher and nobler aspirations of the “citizens”—with the later Marx's theory of reification, we obtain a picture where the diremption of the practical spheres is complemented by the generalized theoretical attitude directed at both the social and the natural life. So, what Marx perceives are isolated subjectivities—Humean subjects, if you like—whose reflections take the form of subjectivized expression of interests, fears, hopes, and anxieties: what modern philosophy and the novel have made familiar to us as “experience.” Looked from another perspective that is actually the secularization of “subjectivity” which Christianity brings forth (as we noted in Chapter 5). As we saw above, Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* explicitly laments this predicament and sees “sensuous” practical life as the element in which true human life flourishes. The story in the later works of Foucault is no less poignant but it sketches a powerful genealogical story for understanding how one cognitive attitude and form of knowledge becomes dominant. His reconstruction of the practical form of life that he calls “care of the self” aims to foreground the reflective elaboration of sociality and the spiritual knowledge sought by the flourishing philosophical schools in the Greek culture and by the more diffuse familial milieu in the Roman period (of which the letter cited above is representative). Even though these forms of sociality begin to be transformed and framed out (20th-century historiography does not even notice the distinctiveness of this form of life that had reigned for a millennium), the spiritual concerns that animated that form of life resurface in the 19th century, both in philosophical problematics of the kind we find in Hegel about the subjects' access to truth and in the social movements of that period. They are of course transposed and hard to recognize and yet there is kinship of a kind.

Marx unwittingly recognizes that change and inherits that kinship. With the exception of Hegel, all the other thinkers who struggle to give voice to the

spiritual/practical knowledge do so against philosophy—Wittgenstein and Heidegger, after Nietzsche and Marx. It is as though philosophy can no longer harbor what sustained it; if once philosophy was essentially the care of the self and a therapy in that deep sense, now it is philosophy that is seen to require therapy. That movement testifies to the difficulty of the task that both critique and genealogy are confronted with: they have to sustain their task in elements that are not hospitable to them. Although what genealogy is after is the forms of knowledge implicit in “the care of the self” model rather than the historical picture of the period, so that it can legitimately seek the “subjugated knowledges”<sup>11</sup> in the normed domains, since after all the latter cannot not be linked to domains they insulate, genealogy seems unable to dig deep to reanimate action.

So now to a question that cannot be evaded (which, I am sure, some readers would be longing to press): “even granting you your long-winded epochal stories and the conceptual challenge of articulating spiritual or practical knowledge, what bearing do they have for us today given our reified world, our governmentalized or normativized domains of sexuality, economics and politics? After all, what we need is more than a glimpse of a form of life—we need the actional frame to be active, generating reflective action, action that has true objectivity.” In response, let me turn to Gandhi’s ethical action to further elaborate the idea of practice, which will enable me to close the circle while resituating both critique and genealogy, for Gandhi had found a way to restore the integrity of the actional frame through *satyagraha*. He had learned from the *Gita* the deep course of action.

While outlining Marx’s theory of fetishism, whenever I spoke of the semblance of objectivity possessed by the reified form of life that capitalism is, I entered the qualification “if it is one.” Of course, Marx’s very expression “semblance of objectivity” conveys something of that qualification too insofar as it is deprived of real objectivity (or, for that matter, real subjectivity) that only a true unity of the nature and the social can have. Now, Nietzsche and Foucault entertain similar doubts about the integrity of the normed domains in the West. “Sexuality” may have triumphed but how can it hope to survive without needing, in some form, erotics; politics may have become governmentalized, but somewhere the practical relation must subsist. So, even if the world now is dominated by the semblance, by the commodity form as bearer of value, subject-form as bearer of rights/interests/desires, political and economic form of governmentalization, the only genuine politics or ethics today is to think the possibility of critical, practical activity as part of a (new?) matrix of self-knowledge, action, and predication.

## Practition

If miraculously Marxism as critique had appeared in India, it would have got busy looking for concepts to articulate the practical forms of life that colonialism was bent on destroying (instead of ratifying colonialism). That unfortunately did not happen (and if it is any consolation, Marxism as critique did not appear anywhere else either). What did happen was Gandhi, who grasped

that point theoretically and, more importantly, practically, and set about articulating and reshaping the lineaments and the salience of practical knowledge, under unimaginably adverse conditions (hostile colonial power, extreme poverty and a highly colonized Congress intelligentsia). His activity (as we have already discussed) involved setting up multiple ethical sites of learning (nature, body, family, temple, school, and village). *Satyagraha* can only be offered in very different domains if reflective action could be incorporated in daily life. He was convinced that unless the practical form of life acquires the stability to integrate the order or matrix of self-knowledge, action and problematization, we are condemned to lead a life that has already been lived out elsewhere. The order that he sought would unite *swadharma, swadeshi, and swaraj* as the horizon of action, an order in which “spiritual laws, like nature’s laws...are self-action” (Gandhi, 2001, 52: 209).

If the Marx of critique were living today, I have a feeling that he would have drastically reformulated the famous Thesis XI—“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” He would have perhaps offered the following: “The philosophers have only tried to change the world, the point is to understand/experience it,” for, genuine understanding/experience is itself transformative. Or, better still, he might have borrowed these paraphrases from Gandhi’s commentary on the *Gita*: It’s ignorance that makes us see knowledge and action as different; true insight is to see them as one. This is the insight that Gandhi uses consistently, and particularly in his experiments in the *Ashram*. But to understand it in any depth we will have to extend the reach of our conceptual capacities to include the ways of action (as Marx was demanding in the Theses).

However, Marx’s sensuous practice or Wittgenstein’s language-game/form of life have been such poignant presence in our intellectual landscape precisely because experiential knowledge and happiness are possible only in the practical matrix. Thus, though the emergence of the naturalistic inquiry as a stable form of matrix to study nature made possible discoveries for anyone participating in it, by the very nature of the case, such participation is not possible for everyone; whereas the practical matrix invites practically everyone’s commitment and engagement. The core idea, then, is this: any element, what in *adhyatmic* thinking gets termed as an *upadhi*, is refined, purified (*parishkritah*), elaborated in a matrix and it has its truth or objectivity or beauty in that matrix. So, what are these elements? They are as diverse as the elements that fall under the category, *upadhi*. Thus sound, sight, relations, gesture, body, time, seasons, all can be, and have been, elaborated into a dynamic matrix which can only be understood action-theoretically (not as state-descriptions). So, we have *gayanshastra, natyashastra, kamashastra, jyothisshastra*. Crisscrossing matrixes are not only not exceptional, but their dynamic presence and functioning is also a testimony to the health of this form of life. The ends of ethical life (*purusharthas*, for example) are ways of organizing the matrixes in order to reflect on them.

Practical teaching, teaching how to act, makes sense only when you are standing in the practical matrix of action. Otherwise, action-knowledge

cannot have much sense. To purify action, to improve an action, to refine an action, are expressions that pertain to the practical matrix. To ritualize an action then is not quite to strip it of meaning (conception), but to find a place for it in a matrix. This is the core picture of the practical form of life which we logically reach on the other side of the human life-form.<sup>12</sup> How to situate and clarify experience in this framework? First an analogy: being in tune is all important in *raaga* music. *Raaga*, in the terminology attempted here, is a matrix elaborated on sound/voice. Not any sound, even pleasant sounding, is being in *raaga*. So, in *anu-bhava*, being in accord with *bhava*, is like being in *raaga*. But the accord involves the same kind of elaboration (or its equivalent) as in the *raaga* case. Being in *raaga* then is like experiencing. So not everything that happens to me or that I suffer is experience. This latter notion is the product of Western modernity. Whether it is the exquisite interiority that modern Western literature depicts—the memories, the longings, the refinements of taste and emotion—or the anthropological givens that philosophy discovers—self-interest (preference, desire, utility) that is the real springs of action or the rights that are the foundation of all entitlements, this is a picture of the agent and his properties (his experience) that is a product of specific history, the result of a transformation (secularization) that frames out the practical matrix. What happens, of course, is more than the latter getting framed out. But since real objectivity of our form of life derives from the practical matrix, we are left with the semblance of objectivity that Marx speaks about. The link between inquiry and experience is extraordinarily crucial for understanding what I am setting out here. To fall back on my analogy (which as we will see is more than an analogy): any sound that I emit, even pleasant-sounding ones, is not *raaga* until through practice, learning, and reflection, I knead the sound into *raaga*, or achieve such mastery that I am able to stream the voice into different *raagas* (or even create a new *raaga*). Of course, the practice, learning, and reflection involved here is of a peculiar kind. We only need the idea here and not the content or the details of that reflection. We want to focus on the equivalent of that practice/learning/reflection when we explore the link between inquiry and experience. The tendency to think of emotions and feelings as experience will not do since these are “noise,” the equivalents of the sound/voice that is not articulated into *raaga*. The cluster of emotions are a given. Undergoing them, for example being angry, is not experience, but understanding how these swirls of emotions look for a hook, and the subtlety with which they find one—that would be experience. So, it is not the self-known character of these emotions that are of interest (being angry is knowing that you are angry), but what inquiry into them yields. Perhaps, in the case of anger, the inquiry notices how these structures are in place no matter what the content and the effort is to not let those structures or their content form or de-form the I. But unlike in the case of music (or other such branches of *shashtra* or practical knowledge) where custom and gharana offer guidelines about turning sound into *raaga*, “guidelines” in the emotional realm could be very diffuse or indeterminate. Rather, there are guidelines and experienced teachers too,<sup>13</sup> except that they are present in the culture in a more complex ways than

a *gharana* and its teacher. More complex, more variegated, more difficult to describe, but not essentially different. The different intellectual or philosophical schools, the Bhakti traditions, the variety of Tantric or Siddha pursuits that have flourished and multiplied testify to a sociality that is dense and richly articulated. That is the reason for saying that the analogy with *raaga* that I have been using is more than an analogy. Looked at this way, we get a deep insight into the elaboration of many shastras—not only *yoga*, *natya*, etc., but also *ayurveda*. It is my contention that these disciplines/practices have the objective of establishing or facilitating inquiry into the body by inserting the latter into different matrixes. The inquiry forms or precipitates experience, if we could put it that way. Neither *yoga* nor *ayurveda* treat the bare body, as the contemporary medical science would. Instead, health or cure must follow from understanding, from the removal of the obstacles (the structures that occlude). Extending these reflections further to *natyashastra* or music, we obtain the insight that beauty—or the aesthetic sphere—is only a further refinement or stylization of experience, not something transcendent to experience (as art essentially is in the West. The so-called avant-garde movements are really violent attempts to negate what is transcendent).

My exploration so far has suggested that the disciplines of practical knowledge present to us a picture in which there is an intrinsic relationship between experience and inquiry, and therefore the analogy they provide for understanding the link between inquiry, experience and living is something far more than mere analogy. The pattern they reveal is the pattern we will find in a more complex way in the general social life if only we know how to look. Indeed, my claim is that sociality itself is to be conceptualized as a product of that link between inquiry, experience and living. It is neither a “dumb generality” nor an entity that gets its meaning solely as a contrast term to the individual. The *shastras* embodying practical knowledge—the ability to create new practitioners—are developed that way because sociality is shaped by experience. Ethical action is action that completes an experience. Or in Gandhi’s free translation/paraphrase of the words of the *Gita*: action needs *shraddha* to become experience.<sup>14</sup> The domain of morality, centered on norms, on the other hand, has little in common with ethics.

Returning now to experience and the practical matrix, only if we accept the frame through which action appears as labor, can we even think of the featurelessness of abstract human labor that the market brings about. But the oneness or unity, if these are the terms we have to use, that *Advaita*, for example, speaks about is not a view of featurelessness like the featurelessness of abstract labor. The practical learning or the experiential learning that the practical matrix makes possible, also makes possible a reflection at a higher level to enable one to exit the matrixes, not in order to embrace what remains outside but precisely as a result of the realization that matrixes are the sites of learning, and that they may also often cease to be that. As sites of learning they must enable one to overcome the ignorance embodied in self-conceptions, intersubjective relations, and in projects and pursuits.

So, if critique brings to sharp relief the “semblance of objectivity,” and genealogy makes visible the objectivity of the practical form of life that has been transformed and framed out, truth-action aims at action that reinstates the true objectivity of actional frame. Can we speak of transformations that keep alive in some fashion what is transformed? The answer: how else can we make sense of the semblance of objectivity? Experience must still be possible despite the experience-occluding structures. There is, then, a profound, deeply illuminating, mutually clarifying and transformative relationship between three ways of understanding and engaging with the social world: Gandhi’s ethical action as elaborated practically in his *satyagraha*, the genealogical understanding that Nietzsche and Foucault sought of the transformation in the domains of practical life, and the critique of political economy through which Marx sought to understand the phenomenon of fetishism, the “semblance of objectivity,” that the social structure of capitalism creates.

We are in a position now to restate Marx’s critique of political economy and to reformulate his idea of reification. When Marx spoke of the “semblance of objectivity” generated by capitalism, he had in mind what he had called the “dumb generality” of the social. The personification and reification—the two sides of fetishism—that capitalism brings about are because of the stripping down of the social, its reduction to the “semblance of objectivity.” Marx’s critique (whether one thinks of it as a critique of political economy or of fetishism or of capitalism), however, takes the category of labor as given. Its scientificity or theoretical validity is not in question for him. So, if the early Marx uses labor to understand the alienation or estrangement as the alienation of the product of one’s labor, the later Marx formulates the labor theory of value to understand the abstract human labor that gives rise to the fetish character of commodities. What Marx misses is the reification that has already turned action into labor. To put it in the language I employed above, the alienation consists in the fact that actions—in the field, in production—cannot be elaborated into a matrix, cannot generate practitioners; actions cannot yield experience anymore. To start with labor as a theoretical category is to already miss the profound transformation taking place within various domains in which actions are alienated in this way; alienated in a way that actions are not allowed to form into experience. What happens to action in economy is homologous to what happens to action in other practical domains like erotics and politics. Labor in the domain of economy (and the discipline of political economy), sex in the domain of sexuality (and in disciplines such as psychiatry, psychoanalysis), citizenship in political theory, all these categories belong in the same order, with a common genealogy. What escapes Marx’s critique of the “semblance of objectivity” is the genealogy of how in different domain of practical life, action is “semblance” of action, not, if you like, praxis. If concepts of practical form of life are action-theoretic, actions in that form of life are concept-practic.

Action to labor is already a transformation of the kind that I have been mapping through genealogy. It is a matter of figuring out how to designate that process, not only in terms of nomenclature, but more deeply by getting

the characterization right. One obvious line of transformation is from *oikos* to economy. But that is just about as illuminating as talking about the transformation from *polis* to politics. Since action is pretty much common to all domains, there is no question of a separate treatment of action to labor as a domain. So, action to labor in, let's say, political economy, alerts us to a more difficult and larger problem of what happens to action in many domains in the process of secularization (not in "capitalism" as Marx would have it).

What allowed us this insight into the transformation of practical domains into experience-occluding sociality is the homological structures we observe in these domains. Mapping or investigating such transformation gives us a clear sense of what genealogy does. If Nietzsche could be seen as grappling to understand the more general transformation of ethics into morality, Foucault gives us a factual account of the creation of such domains as "sexuality" and governmentality (strictly speaking politics and economy, though he uses the term "governmentality" in two different ways, as a mechanism and as a domain). I have been arguing that we should see "the caste-system" in the same way too. It is the result of the transformation of the elaborate practical matrix of sociality. Not surprisingly, all the domains are the creation of the West. It is the Indian case that compels us to ask the most difficult, and at the same time, the most productive question: can we speak of transformation in which what is apparently transformed still remains accessible and the resultant entity has the most peculiar ontological status in that what presumably exists has distorting effects but is not experiential?

Hardly has this question found its appropriate conceptual level and locale, it immediately reveals the "semblance of objectivity" in a different light. When we transpose this cognitively and ethically urgent and explosive question back to the other transformed domains—"sexuality", economy and politics—the reverberations are overwhelming. The implications are both terrifying and exhilarating. Terrifying because in what the West (and we in India) regards as the crucial dimensions of life, we have to conclude that there is no experience where ontologically peculiar entities have established their domains; exhilarating because the transformed entity must remain accessible to experience, however one needs to access it. The two frames idea is one way to formulate this problem, both for us and the West (see Chapters 3 and 4). Foucault indeed does this when he offers a genealogy of the care of the self that has simply dropped out of the frame that dominates the Western intellectual world.<sup>15</sup>

The transformations that we are talking about are extraordinarily complex and epochal. It will be a while before we are able to delineate the terms and scope of the transformations and their social and cognitive significance. To start with, although I have been talking about transformation of x to y (action to labor, erotics to sexuality, or, nature to natural resource<sup>16</sup>), it is not necessary and not always the case that there is a term or a concept that has been naturally given. Indeed, when Foucault gives us a genealogical reconstruction of the domains that were broken up, bundled together, and normed to create

“sexuality”, it is not simply erotics that gets transformed. In his masterly account that serves us as a paradigm for the kind of transformation we want to frame, he reconstructs four domains—erotics, dietetics, oikonomia, wisdom—that gets subjected to normativization. Similarly, innumerable practices, rituals, and knowledge (discipline) were fractured, homogenized, and bundled together to give rise to the domain called “the caste-system”. So, when one designates the domain that got transformed with a concept or term—erotics, oikos, polis—these terms are place-holders for the genealogical work of outlining or conceptualizing the domains that get framed out or transformed. (I imagine that this is how Bilgrami too would view the matter in the case of his terms—human being, nature, people, knowledge to live by.) In any case, as we are dealing with the practical domain, it should not be surprising if a term or a concept does not stand out as expressive of the domain we are seeking to reframe or understand or genealogically reconstruct. The Indian case would present a different situation altogether since what we see down the millennia is the diverse elaborations and repetitions of the practical matrixes.<sup>17</sup>

The conceptual apparatus (and the new terminology) that I have put in place aims to bring into frame the practical domain that got framed out or transformed by colonialism. My theoretical reconstruction of the practical domain is not historical, though the hope is that it could be so used. What it hopes to do is to give a conceptual sense of the objectivity that Indian thought sought. The inspiration here is Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* which had done exactly that in preparation for realizing *satyagraha* (a version of what I have been calling ethical action). Once we have the structures of that thought, it has deep explanatory uses. If we can conceptually understand the functioning of the practical domain—and the kind of problematics it characteristically gives rise to—we have a handle on the actional frame. We can raise questions about how it could be operant even though its thought milieu and collection of heuristics is fractured. The model, then, can not only be fleshed out historically and genealogically, but doing so would deliver the kind of understanding we are seeking of our present. We are in essence reanimating the Marxian project of overcoming the “semblance of objectivity” that envelopes us. We are, however, giving it an entirely different basis, a basis in a practical domain. The basis is inspired by Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* rather than *Capital*. While critique is incomplete without the understanding of the practical domain provided by genealogy, neither addresses the question of the action that can overcome false objectivity; that is, the action that completes experience. So, the Gandhian basis for understanding the “semblance of objectivity” is crucial because Gandhian ethical action seeks ways to overcome the “semblance of objectivity” in order to achieve true objectivity.

Rather than the labor theory of value to explain the “semblance of objectivity” of capitalism, we need to develop an action theory and an action-theoretical account of practice to explain, to properly understand reification (the semblance of objectivity). After all, what is labor? A theoretical category to understand specific kinds of action. But doing so runs into the same problem

that our model case, erotics to “sexuality”, demonstrates, postulating a property we cannot access, turning action-theoretic concepts into objects (“concepts” becoming “objects”). So, political economy brings in talk of agricultural labor, domestic labor, industrial labor, intellectual labor, manual labor, etc. This is already a homogenization and a transformation of practitioners (action in a matrix); already a reification. The idealized picture we often conjure up of village life—harvest, festival, web of relationships—should not be taken in the wrong sense of idealization (think of Aurelius’ letter)! As Gandhi himself often says it is idealization in the scientific sense. In the transformation effected by normativization, the focus is on agent and its property rather than on agency and actions generated. In the other perspective, which is now rendered obscure, even thought is action. The idea of *yajna* or sacrifice in Gandhi (taken from *the Gita*) is this: how to see action and learn from it. So even nature or cosmos is seen as action, from which one can learn. That sacrifice has nothing to do with the (possibly) supererogatory notion of personal sacrifice. In the action universe, the *samsara* constituted by innumerable crisscrossing and nesting practitioners, past is the space that enables Gandhi to see his *satyagraha* as the continuation of the *yajna* *the Gita* initiates or undertakes, that we may indeed by carrying on the *satyagraha* if only we can remove the *avidya* from the *upadhis* that have entangled our actions. Recall Foucault’s remark that the Greek *bios* cannot be understood on the model of subjectivity that Christianity produces. Indeed, we tend to associate the English word “experience” with subjectivity, so much so that we read subjective into experience. When we say “experience” we often only mean subjective experience. It’s psychic interiority that is the domain of moral reflection in the secular world. If in Greek thought *bios* anchors reflection about the good life or ethical life, in Indian thought it would be *anu-bhava* (in accord with happening, literally) or *samsara* (which is simply untranslatable). However, practical reflection or *adhyatma* is not “about” *anubhava* or *samsara*; in some essential sense reflection is part of *anubhava* or *samsara*. The concept I have tried to weave together with the neologism “practition” is an attempt to capture the sense in which action, reflection, experience come together as a “material” process, if you like. Although I have often resorted to expression such “reflection on experience,” the challenge has always been to convey the inseparability of reflection and experience, so that when I say that normativity insulates experience from reflection or creates experience-occluding structures, I want to be able to situate precisely and vividly the violence that secularization generates. Only then can we really begin to appreciate Gandhi’s profound concern to make *ahimsa* a practice.

The Gandhian reformulation of the basis of Marx’s critique is also, equally, a reformulation of the way genealogy is understood. I have been seeing genealogy as an investigation of how practical domains get transformed into domains that generate ontologically peculiar entities (such as “sexuality”, “the caste-system”, and “the citizen,” to use three different examples taken from three different accounts that, as I have already noted, converge). It is the radical

Gandhian insight into action (inspired in turn by *the Gita*) that enables us to see that despite the transformations, the possibility of experience is intact: the actional frame that has gone underground can be brought back into salience, reframed to allow reflection and inquiry in such a way that ethical action is made possible. Whereas both Marx (and his politics such as it was) and Foucault were apt to leave us with the ontologically peculiar entities and the quasi-actions they generate in the fetish domains of economy and politics, Gandhi helps us rethink politics as setting up of sites of ethical learning.

## Notes

- 1 Moreover, ideology has become an intractable notion. Eventually, it will perhaps be possible to rescue it, once we have greater clarity regarding critique.
- 2 Here are the theses that lay stress on the practical and the social:
  - VIII) All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.
  - IX) The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.
  - X) The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity.
- 3 On the sense of the *a priori* involved see Thompson (2008: 6, 19) and Rödl (2007: 20–48). As Thompson (2008) convincingly argues, the predication we learn to make about life-forms ('bobcats breed in spring') are *a priori*. More importantly, the point carries over to the predication we understand or use in practical form of life too. I return to Thompson's practical epistemology in the last chapter.
- 4 Ideology is an ability that in the reified form of life (if it is a form of life) can raid any thought structure to open up anything—nature, self, whatever—for justification: first, the marking out or opening of an area as needing justification, then comes grafting from whatever discursive resources (theories, philosophies) onto that space. It is interesting to figure out how all the familiar entities and sites—the state, market, family, and many more—got opened up this way. It is by now such a ubiquitous and ‘natural’ phenomenon that it is hard even to come up with a startling example that reveals how odd this operation of ideability really is. A good example would be nature seen through environmentalism. Another example would be the ‘self’ and the folk psychology that come in with it, drawn from all sorts of sources (philosophy, psychology, economics, pop existentialism and pop psychoanalysis, spiritual mysticism). ‘I need to get in touch with my deeper self,’ ‘She is guilt-tripping me,’ ‘You need to look out for yourself,’ ‘I need my space,’ ‘He is weak-willed.’ Think, finally, of the fate of Marxism itself in many regimes or movements that call themselves socialist.
- 5 Marx was too historicist in his characterization of Aristotle’s cognitive limitation caused by his social world. So, in a way, he did not pay attention to the way Aristotle was trying to understand the actional frame through his concepts of *poesies, techne, and praxis*.
- 6 Although Foucault does use norm and normative quite frequently, the sense in which I am using this term is not captured by them. His governmentalization comes closest, but he is not consistent with that usage. Although normativization

is the mechanism underlying the many domains he is doing a genealogy of, he never explicitly theorizes it. Nor does Nietzsche even though he had developed a nose for hunting out normativity from the strangest nooks of European culture. While Nietzsche did use fiction (made up philology, for example), his target was the real moralization that Western culture was undergoing.

- 7 When Foucault proposed this in the first volume of his History of Sexuality, there was much outrage, some even calling Foucault an essentialist (of the Orientalist type). Whereas I believe this was the insight that allowed Foucault to diagnose the experience-insulating structures of normativized domains (see the next note), which for him included the “positive” or “liberatory” discourse of homosexuality, and would most certainly include the contemporary discourse on gender-sexuality continuum. It is a testimony to the grip that normativity has on the humanities and the social sciences in North America (which, tragically, effectively means on the academic world in general) that the deepest anti-normative impulse of Foucault’s later work has been completely ignored.
- 8 That Foucault was trying to get hold of these ontologically peculiar domains and entities was completely obscured by the vapid and anodyne doctrine of constructivism to which it got assimilated in the Anglophone academia. To a small extent, Foucault himself contributed to this by the emphasis in his early work on discourse and the incantation about power/knowledge. Thus, the radically new question about normativity he was trying to pose never quite saw the day. Indeed, I have suggested that even his obscure power/knowledge can be read differently if we see his concern as mapping the secularization dynamic.
- 9 The ‘theio-practical project,’ as Remy Brague puts it (approvingly), of theology was to transform the practical domain of politics and economics (Brague, 2007: 6–7). Like many of the concepts and terms of Greek intellectual life, economy too was theologized (see Agamben, 2011). Brague explicitly and Agamben more confusingly seem interested in renewing theology. Unlike in Heidegger and Foucault (and to a lesser extent the early Derrida), who were trying to overcome theology and its pernicious secular manifestations in intellectual life, the recent interest in theology, inspired by Schmitt’s political theology, seems rather shallow. The waters of theology are deep and murky and the post-colonial scholars who, drawn perhaps by the eclectic writings of Agamben, Badiou, and even Zizek (all of whom have been rediscovering Biblical themes and figures), have wandered into it seem unaware of what theology is, leave alone the implication of doing theology.
- 10 I am of course referring to “On the Jewish Question” (Marx, 1975).
- 11 To use a phrase from his power/knowledge days, where it wasn’t clear what it was referring to. It was therefore interpreted in all sorts of ways, as, for example, “knowledge” produced by the marginalized groups.
- 12 First step toward gaining a deeper insight into how a form of life that has practical knowledge as its integrating matrix is to see action as a unit like a predicate, embedded in what we call practice, in the same way as predicates are seen as embedded in propositions or judgments. Consequently, action-explanation is a primitive unit of a life-form like (Fregean) predication. That is to say, acting (action, doing, or carrying out of an action), action-understanding, and action-explanation need to be understood in the same way as Frege made us understand predication. There is a distinct yet related area to look into, which may throw light on action-forms, namely, the grammar (in the Wittgensteinian sense) of action-theoretic concepts and what might be called the logic of practices. The Aristotle-Frege tradition that Michael Thompson (2008) self-consciously pursues has opened up new avenues for exploring the logic of practices.

- 13 Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1958: 227). “Correct prognoses will generally issue from the judgment of those with better knowledge of mankind. Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through ‘experience.’ Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip—This is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here.”
- 14 A word needs to be said again about Gandhi’s English terminology which for understandable reason seems seeped in theology. Like in the sentence he translates from the *Gita*, he uses “faith” to translate *shraddha*. “Faith” is a theory-laden concept, whereas *shraddha* is an ordinary word used to mean “concentration” as in “do something with concentration” or purpose or purposive trust, say in an instrument or a way. Similarly, when he is elaborating the path of *karma-yoga*, the phrases he often uses—“service” and “dignity of labour”—seem like ideas of protestant doctrine. This is a terminological overlay rather than actual theologization, if you like, of the concepts. As I hope this section brings out, Gandhi’s idea of ethical action has little in common with morality, notwithstanding his often-careless use of the language of morality.
- 15 It would be important also to see if the transformation that I am delineating through the works of Marx, Nietzsche, Gandhi, Foucault, and Balagangadhara converges, overlaps, or is co-terminus with the four transformations—nature to natural resource; human being into citizen; people into population, knowledge to live by into expertise to rule—that Bilgrami (2014) has been mapping. If there are convergences or overlaps, as there clearly are, then, what about the stories we tell about these transformations? What about the implications of these stories?
- 16 In Bilgrami’s scheme. That the picture we have of nature is itself a work of design is something that Dilip da Cunha’s ground-breaking design inquiry into ocean of wetness is demonstrating.
- 17 Reading the action-theoretic concepts of those matrixes as properties of the world, as Orientalist scholarship did and the current social sciences continue to do, is a cognitive mistake of a serious kind with disastrous consequences. The cognitive blindness to a different form of knowledge mars much of the current scholarship on India’s past. Sheldon Pollock’s much hailed work (Pollock, 2006) provides a perfect illustration. He keeps noting the *kavya-prashasti* (poetry, inscriptive announcements) phenomenon and the repetition of puranic place names across what he calls the Sanskrit cosmopolis. The sexy terminology apart, his framework retains the orientalist picture of Brahmins and *Vedas* in unadulterated form. His focus is apparently the spread of Sanskrit (and its replacement later with vernaculars). It is unclear what his question is. Is he asking why Sanskrit spread the way it did (in contrast to the spread of Latin in Europe)? Or is it a how question? And what exactly is the relationship between the phenomenon he notes and the spread of language? The more difficult but central question, as we have seen, has to do with the practical form of life. Once we have a grasp of that, it would not be difficult to understand the replication, nesting, elaboration, and creation of practical matrix. The *kavya-prashasti* phenomenon and the repetition of place names are simply a fall out of this process. Even the distinction between Sanskrit and vernacular cosmopolis would seem ill-motivated when the cultural salience is provided by the practical matrix. So, for example, the *vacanakaras* of 12th century were both replicating and elaborating a matrix. What they were doing is no different from what the *Dasas* did later or what the philosophers like Shankara did earlier. Language drops out as a factor. Incidentally, I am very tempted to argue that *anubhava mantapa* is not a place name. It is a concept-metaphor of the same kind as my practical matrix. That it has been turned into a place name is now understandable!

## 7 Sites of Learning and Intellectual Parasitism

### The Case for New Humanities

That book [*the Bhagavad Gita*] is not a historical record, but it is the record of the concrete experience of its author, whether it was really Vyas or not I am not concerned. And if it is a record of anybody's experience, it must not be beyond us to be able to test the truth of it by repeating the experience. I am testing the truth almost every-day in my life and find it never failing.

—M.K. Gandhi (2001, V:175)

There have been inquiries in Indian traditions whose objective has been to enhance and expand the experiential world. Perhaps implicit in those inquiries was a meta-level inquiry about what kind of inquiries do that and how. We need to raise that question now because the gulf between cultural learnings and academic disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences (the human sciences for short) seems only to be increasing. If our “education” at all levels has not made an attempt to connect with cultural learning, it is perhaps not too late to ask how the latter is being nourished and transmitted. It is certainly a research question for the human sciences, since, after all, they have to be concerned with experience, clarifying it, understanding it, and expanding it. That the question has taken this form and the concern that the experiential world is increasingly losing its self-aware, that is, experiential, character as structures inimical or indifferent to it are distorting or undermining it and that such concerns are emerging in all spheres of life in India and elsewhere, goes to show that we are already beginning the inquiry. It remains for us to explore how to deepen it and how to make the existing disciplines responsive to it. My suggestion is that we begin by reflecting on the way the academic life has been parasitic: we seem to be pursuing the disciplines for reasons other than intellectual discovery and the disciplines not only are not articulating any learning but seem inimical to cultural learning. I am making a number of assumptions in beginning this inquiry. I hope to clarify and defend them in the course of this reflection, but none of them seems unjustifiable or unintuitive to start with. My strategy then is as follows: I will begin by motivating a certain kind of reflection about cultural learning arising out of what we ordinarily notice around us as a disturbing social phenomenon,

whether it has to with the frenetic construction activity or commercialization of education. With some hold on the idea of cultural learning and parasitism, I distinguish between pragmatic and intellectual parasitism. Though they are interdependent, it's the latter that distorts our experience. The disciplines in the human sciences perpetuate parasitism either because they are unable or unwilling to examine how they end up severing all connection to cultural learning. To demonstrate my argument, I take up history and philosophy, both of which, in their different ways, render it impossible for Indians to access their past and its relationship to truth. The interrogation of history will try to answer why we have to give up our enslavement to it in order to access the past; similarly, questioning the process by which translation/interpretation of Indian thought transforms *adhyatma* into philosophy will also force us to choose between *adhyatma* and philosophy. It will turn out that our experiential discomfort with parasitism was already the beginning of *adhyatmic* inquiry in so far as the latter is always seen by Indian traditions to be present in experience itself to reflect on and resist structures that occlude it (parasitism being a dimension of the *upadhis* Indian traditions were concerned to meditate upon).

### Varieties of Parasitism

When we look at the different domains of life in contemporary India, the metaphor of parasitism suggests itself. Can we use that metaphor to begin a serious inquiry into what might be a generalized phenomenon? Rather than using that metaphor as a moralizing judgment, would it be possible to theorize it as a social phenomenon? Let's work with a couple of examples to get clearer on what kind of social phenomenon we are talking about. Consider "real estate": there is little doubt that it is an entirely parasitic activity. What is it parasitic upon? On the experience of home, the intimate relationship between land and dwelling, the web of relationships, of certain ethos and obligations.<sup>1</sup> The frenzied economics of real estate is entirely stifling the experience of *oikos*, even though without the latter there is nothing for that frenzy to exploit. But the experience of home has, as it were no home to nourish it, to develop the intricate details of its webs, modulate its ethos. Instead, the economics of real estate is constructing, through advertisement (parasitic activity par excellence), a phantasm of home, a living style, and simultaneously criminalizing the industry as the frenzy has to be driven, heightened, and maintained. It is not only that in cities and towns people can no longer afford to have a home, but importantly their experience of home is being corrupted and criminalized in unheard of ways. The idea of home is in danger of being rendered homeless by the parasite "real estate." One needs to say a lot more both about how real estate is distorting, stifling, and rendering homeless what it is dependent on and, even more importantly, about the kind of language and ethos "home" needs to flourish. Even these brief remarks about "real estate" as an example raise an important issue, namely whether

such a social phenomenon, rather than being specific to post-colonial India, is a product of capitalism. Although very interesting, it is not an issue we need to address at the moment. For our purposes, it is enough that the example gives a sense of the social phenomenon parasitism designates and what it does to the experience (the organism, as it were) on which it is parasitic. To take another example which has a similar structure, consider health as an experiential domain and the health care industry. The economics of the latter, and its allied regimes, user experience studies, advertisement for big hospital chains and health tourism, create a phantasmatic world of fear and need that leave no room for another way of relating to health, namely health as part of ethical living (the fads such as veganism are perhaps a distorted attempt to give expression to the latter in the same way as *vaastu* perhaps plays a similar role in the real estate sector).

With the help of these relatively straight-forward examples of parasitism, where the parasitic structures distort and smother the experience that nonetheless sustain them, we can now move to cases or domains that seem to have a more complicated structure of dependency and creaming off. Both education and politics present examples of parasitism where the relationship between the experience and the parasitic structures is mediated (if that is the word we need) by disciplines and/or institutions that are inherited from colonialism. One could, of course, point out that here too we can get hold of the experience—learning and governance or self-governance—on which the parasitic structure is erected. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see that the disciplines and institutions are perpetuated by Indians—academics and politicians—who seem to be parasitic on those disciplines and institutions; and unlike in the case of the flourishing real estate sector, there is no unambiguous answer why those institutions and disciplines are perpetuated. Are there cognitive or practical gains? There is of course a colonial story about why India must have political and educational institutions of the Western kind, but with the exception of Gandhi and Tagore, there has been no attempt really to fundamentally question that story, leave alone developing an alternative story about how we want to conceive of education or politics. The enslavement to certain ways of looking at ourselves—which are embodied in the disciplines and the institutions—poses problems about how we understand the structure of parasitism here. If education “obstructs” the Indians’ interaction with their conceptual world and at the same time produces enslavement to a frame that prevents any genuine cognition or action, what sustains such insulation and allows its reproduction?

The experience of learning present in the culture may not even impinge, or do so only tangentially, on the disciplines and institutions which perpetuate themselves through the process of cognitive enslavement. Herein lies the complication: unlike in the case of real estate where the domain of experience that was exploited could not be done away with even though it underwent distortion and deformation, in the case of education (we will stay with education in order to keep the discussion manageable), the experience of learning has been

actively disowned, disavowed, and denigrated. It is as though the disciplines and the institutions are parasitic on the process of denying the experience of learning, the denial taking the form of denigration or disavowal of practices which embodied the learning in India! By saying this, I am not advancing any paradoxical claim but merely noting our predicament. We rightly think of education as a process that abstracts from and elaborates on the learning implicit in a culture. In India, however, education has become a process that denies cultural learning. The parasitic perpetuation of the disciplines and the institutions has meant that new discipline (but not learning) has been instituted. The cultural learning cannot simply be denied in this fashion; so rendered mute, distorted, and uncared for, it makes its presence felt by taking hold of the same institutional structures for pragmatic ends. The latter case might make us think of institutions such as the state universities, where everything—faculty selection, vice-chancellorship—is, to put it euphemistically, negotiated. But we would be overlooking the most corrosive aspect of pragmatic parasitism as opposed to the intellectual parasitism, with which we will largely be concerned, if we confine ourselves to the more obvious aspect of what I would like to term the “creaming off” phenomenon,” namely instrumentally exploiting a discipline, a practice, or an institution, without being concerned for its integrity or its place in the larger context.<sup>2</sup>

Though there is clearly a distinction between intellectual and pragmatic parasitism, we should be aware of the more complex interdependency or even interchangeability between the two. The practice of natural sciences in India too is a victim of pragmatic parasitism, as indeed is the domain of the arts. The superficial success of Indian science manifested in the global integration of some scientific institutions (and scientists) should not mask the fact that the learning that produced the natural sciences has not been assimilated or made our own. The analysis of that situation has to be postponed to another occasion to focus on the phenomenon that I want to get hold of, namely cognitive enslavement and the intellectual parasitism that it perpetuates. The humanities and the social sciences are hollow because they do not transmit any learning, because they actively deny and denigrate the cultural learning whose incorporation alone could have led to their revitalization and reconceptualization. Ironically, though, if we were to do that, the disciplines which survive only because we are enslaved to them would disintegrate. How do we today, situated as we are in the parasitic structure of the education system, try to incorporate the cultural learning into our disciplinary practices? The task is both daunting and necessary because the cultural learning is not simply there to be appropriated. In fact, as I have suggested or hinted, it is muted and distorted. That is why the task is daunting—the case to be made is that education has to involve articulating that cultural learning, nourishing that experience, formulating new kind of theories for its extension and development. The task is at the same time necessary and urgent because without undertaking it, our intellectual and pragmatic parasitism will continue, making it impossible eventually to even glimpse what is being occluded.

I want to begin this process of interrogating our intellectual parasitism with history and philosophy. To the extent that the questioning I undertake here extends the framework and argument that I have been outlining in my other essays, what follows will be simultaneously clarificatory and methodological, substantive and programmatic. My discussion of history will in large part be a commentary on Balagangadha's provocative talk (2014) which forces Indians to choose between history and the past. Reflecting on the grounds for setting up the choice that way clears the way for posing another, equally dramatic choice which is actually implicit in the first choice, namely *adhyatma* or philosophy?

### **History or the Past? Historical Consciousness as Cognitive Enslavement**

Irawati Karve's *Yuganta* used to be recommended to young people as an exemplary “progressive” or “historical” reading of Indian past through its “mythology” (Karve, 2006 [1968]). Although I have forgotten most of the book, I still remember its attempt to calculate the age of Bhishma at the time of the Kurukshetra battle. Apparently, Bhishma would have been in his late 90s. The image has stayed with me of a frail old man barely able to lift his bow. I must admit to being both angry and amused at that time; but even now when I think about that image, some feeling stirs in me. It is hard to name, perhaps akin to a sense of violation accompanied by a vague feeling of aimless reproach that this should not have happened. Rather than explain away this peculiar effect and its persistence, I want to look at it as the violation of an intuition that is transmitted through a form of what I have called cultural learning. I put it in this cautious and tentative way because no work has been done to understand the ways in which the *Kavyas* and *Puranas* are transmitted. They have of course been subjected to all sorts of analysis and categorization: studied as Hindu religious texts, analyzed as part of Indo-European mythologies, collected as theogony, considered as part of theology, and scrutinized as history. When I say we have not studied the ways in which *Kavyas* and *Puranas* have been transmitted, I do not mean those analyses and classifications. They are the problems we inherit as part of our historical consciousness. As long as we regard historical past as exhausting the conception of the past and historiography as the only approach to it, we will not be able to inquire into the cultural learning that transmits a certain way of relating to the stories and characters of the *Kavyas*.

As a discipline, it would be difficult to find a more eclectic and unselfconscious discipline than history. Not only are its presuppositions unclarified, its functioning and method tend to be largely *ad hoc*. As Hayden White (White, 2014: 265n5) has repeatedly pointed out, the various aspects of historiography are left unclarified because the vagueness surrounding them is essential to the belief that there is indeed a real referent for “history.” It is a real miracle why history has such a hold on us! However, although history in its secular

garb cannot answer the question about its referent, theology regards history as designating something real and true, namely history as expression of God's plan or intention. Indeed, for theology, history tracks the God's Kingdom on Earth—history is the history of the Christian *ecclesia*, the community of believers, past, present, and future. The notion of truth and falsity too play a central role in this theological conception, where it is all important to sort out lies about the human past in order to decipher God's plan for humans. Believing in false or imaginary things would endanger salvation itself. So, history ought to study the true past, which is Biblical; by the same token, Christianity turns all the diverse pasts of humanity into so many false pasts that eventually "ought" to lead to the one true Biblical history (the doctrine of *praeparatio evangelica*). From Augustine to Hegel, this vision was worked into a philosophy of history that was self-consciously theological, and precisely for that reason, there was clarity about what "history" referred to and what is truth and falsity in history. The historiographical space is thus a theological space, opened up to validate the story of Jesus' Christ nature as a "true" story. Subsequently, the space acquires many "theological" properties such as God's plan, pattern, directionality, and teleology.<sup>3</sup> However, in its secular garb, it can no longer provide these as answers and as a discipline it has not been able to come up with a convincing alternative conception of what "history" refers to and what is historical truth. As the debates about the nature of historical explanation and role of narrative in history have made amply clear, there is not only no clarity about historical truth and historical causality, history has not quite figured out why the only sense it makes is because of the implicit or explicit narrative structure, thereby making, ironically, the fictive elements or devices central to its intelligibility.

If we focus on the lack of rigor and cohesion of the discipline and its eclectic methods, it becomes hard to understand why anyone has bought into history and the historical attitude, especially in India. The only hypothesis is that somehow (some? considerable number of?) Indians have come to look at their past historically. That is to say, they have taken over the colonial view of Indian past. The 19th-century demand to write our own history was the beginning of this process. Having history or wanting history meant taking over the historical attitude already written into the historiography produced. No matter what happens to the evaluations in nationalist or later leftist historiography, the enslavement to history remains. As Nandy has pointed out vividly and forcefully, both the left and the right are the "illegitimate" children of the West who have now engaged in an epic battle, after escaping from the "orphanage of history" (Nandy, 1995: 65). The historical consciousness has indeed become a major part of cognitive enslavement: to underwrite the latter's parasitic use of the colonial descriptions of Indian social and intellectual world (the immoral caste-system that is part of the "evil" "Hindu religion"), history begins to colonize the past. The search for historical truth or the transformation of the past into history creates the kind of problems that we have witnessed—Rama's birthplace, Basaveshwara's rebellion or his

caste, or at a much larger and diffuse sense, Aryan invasion.<sup>4</sup> Do the problems arise because of the establishment of “truths” or something else? How do the factoids—“Basava tore his sacred-thread”—by themselves create problems? What in the historical narratives has the potential to create problems? We need to understand in greater detail and depth the mechanism by which history destroys the past. Something that Hayden White, a contemporary skeptic about historical knowledge, says might be worth thinking about in this context. His general thesis is that all historical works at bottom rely on or presuppose a philosophy of history (in the theological sense).<sup>5</sup> He also argues that when historical narratives employ factoids (say annals or chronicles), they necessarily moralize (White, 1987). Is the historiographical space already a moralized space and is that the reason why collection of truths has the potential to create conflict and violence? But neither factoids nor narrative as a device have anything to do with moralization. Where does moralization enter? It is always already there in the parasitic acceptance of either the frames or the descriptions or both. When a community is given a “true” past, which consists in a series of “factoids” cobbled together as narrative, any “truth” (that is, any factoid) can acquire great “moral significance” and any perceived attempt to contest the “truth” will give rise to conflict because those who are invested in the moral significance of the “truth,” those, in other words, whose history it has become, feel threatened. One cannot any more say that Rama is not an historical figure or that his Ayodhya is not our Ayodhya without incurring the wrath of those invested in the “factoid.” It is out of the question to even to point out that “Basava tore his sacred-thread” is not an archivally verifiable fact because it has become central to the moralized narrative about Basava and the *vachanakaras'* fight against Brahmanism. The “objective past” that history thus brings about is not open to intellectual inquiry; it can only be emplotted differently (as White would say). From the utterly derisory colonial to the chic post-modern subaltern historiography (via the earnest nationalist and the righteous leftist), the “objective past” of India constructed by historiography has remained fixed, but the past has become inaccessible.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the intellectual parasitism here consists in not only accepting the particular descriptions—say of “the caste-system”—but the evaluation that underlies it; similarly, looking at the past historically implies not only certain classification and categorization of Indian textual material but embodying a historical and historicizing view into those material. The attempt, therefore, to calculate Bhishma’s age, however ridiculous it appears, is merely implementing the historical view. As do the Sangh Parivar view of Puranic figures, events, and names (some of these views are so naive, it is hard to believe they are not meant as silly provocation or baiting). When such a historical view comes to embody and endorse a nationalism, then there is imminent danger that nothing of the saliences of the cultural learning remains anymore even as a discomfort caused by the intuition of loss. To accept the particular description with the classifications and categorization is to commit oneself to the frame it

embodies; to subscribe to the frame implies being led to those descriptions. Doubtless starting one way rather than the other may allow for a limited variety of evaluative and terminological differences (“our historical past was so great that we had flying machines and plastic surgery” or “we will need to get an accurate view of the grisly, oppressive structures of Indian history”), but it is a loop which effectively keeps out any whiff of the cultural learning that might disturb the frame or the description. What is at stake is the loss of a conceptual capacity that the cultural learning had assiduously nurtured.

So, the choice: history or the past. But if we choose history, whether the frame or the actual descriptions the frame has produced, we are in effect saying that there is no cultural learning that is likely to bring forth new saliences and knowledge. For some of us, there is no choice at all. When we turn to *itihasa*, our attitude, therefore, cannot be one of either reading it as history or of reading it historically (historicizing it, as they say). What might be thought of as a radical shift is really an obvious one. Surely, we cannot be taking the Western frame to understand *itihasa* when *itihasa* has made the past a site of learning for us, has enacted the relationship between truth and the past! Rejecting history as disguised theology is a first step toward re-accessing our past. The next step is to ask what understanding *itihasa* itself embodies or how it makes the past a site of learning. The *iti* in *itihasa* presents truth anaphorically: it refers back to something, but that something is *adhyatmic* truth. However, truth (“*sat*”) here is a radically different notion than the truth theology/history was after. The latter has to do with conventional truths, that is, with what exists or facts. *Sat* is real but does not *exist*; it is real because it is not an existent, that is, what perishes and passes. The opposition between truth and fact that played such a central role in the Gandhi–Tagore debate is again at play here. We can know “facts” in one sense of know; what is true is what we can access experientially. That is why any experience is what it is because it can potentially access the truth (*sat*). Because we can access the truth, we can also attain happiness of a kind that is not transitory. *Ananda* is what you experience then when you access or stand in *sat*, which is not a fact or, as we will see soon, *upadhi*. If accessing the past is accessing *adhyatmic* truth, it cannot be the case that the past is a temporal entity. So, when we say that *itihasa* presents truth anaphorically, the referring back relationship is akin to a logical relationship. The major source of difficulty, the real stumbling block in understanding this notion has to do with the fact that historical consciousness is an important and particularly invidious component of cognitive enslavement. I am wondering if it is due to historical consciousness that we now find it difficult to get away from the idea that the past is in essence a temporal entity. So, while it is undoubtedly true that the anaphoric kind of relationship between *itihasa* and *adhyatma* or past and truth needs more elaboration than Balagangadhara has given (or I can give, but see the concluding chapter), it is important to appreciate the absolutely crucial insight it provides into how practical reflection turns past into a site of learning. *Mahakavyas* such as Mahabharata initiate or set the

context for a learning process through stories that is *adhyatmic*; through these stories, we learn about what is accessible in or through experience. I imagine we need to see the *anu* in *anu-bhava* as the transforming or extending or the completing of experience made possible by that access.

Balagangadhara's concern was to show how history effects a separation between *adhyatma* and *itihasa*. Equally responsible for that separation is the discipline philosophy. We not only have to choose between the past and history, we have to also confront another choice: philosophy or *adhyatma*.

### **Adhyatma or Philosophy?**

It would appear that all the branches of Western philosophy (except perhaps logic<sup>7</sup>) deal with problems inherited from theology. If some of them appear transformed, it is only because the new idiom derives either from a pervasive scientism or the use of formidable-seeming logical apparatus. So, even though philosophy may shudder to think of itself as a handmaid of theology, its problems still bear the imprint of theology. Some essential qualifications need to be noted before we examine how the presence and practice of philosophy could be a problem for Indians. Unlike historical consciousness, which appears to have sunk roots in the Indian sensibility, philosophical structuring of Indian thought seems to be largely confined to the academic field, such as it is. The filtering of Indian intellectual traditions through the classificatory categories and problem field of Western philosophy deforms our access to Indian thought (if we were taking the academic route). This filtering has close links with history to the extent it is the Western historiography of philosophy that influences the classification, thus feeding into and reinforcing the Orientalist/Indological enterprise of comparing Western theology/philosophy and Indian thought (for example, the study of Indian "soteriology" or "eschatology"). There is yet another strand of Western philosophy that attempts explicitly to shape the historical consciousness, namely Hegelian Marxism. Whether through the scheme of dialectical/historical materialism or through transition and mode of production debates and discussion of class character of the state, the treatment of history and historical consciousness takes explicit philosophical form. Philosophy, then, plays an indirect role in re-elaborating the Orientalist picture of Hinduism and its eschatology, its soteriology and spirituality. The separation of *adhyatma* as philosophy/theology from *itihasa* as either history or mythology is due in large part to philosophy. This separation is then reinforced by the constitution of Indian philosophical texts as objects of philological and translational exercise. Despite this burgeoning scholarship on Indian "philosophy," our discomfiture with the translation of terms such as *maya* or *sat* or *upadhi* into English (or any other Western language) has not gone away. It cannot be that after more than a century of translating and interpreting Indian thought into "philosophy," we are still in search of better, more accurate equivalents for these terms. How do we then account for the persisting discomfiture with the

English terms for what is regarded as the central concepts of Indian thought? Every time *dharma* is translated as “religion,” we wince; when we see *maya* translated as “illusion,” we protest; *atman* as Self or Soul mystifies us; *upadhi* as “limitation” or “obstruction,” *adhyasa* as “superimposition,” while seemingly innocuous, just do not afford us any handle on them for the kind of critical thinking they are supposed to enable us to perform. Well, a sophisticated philosophical response would be to say that this discomfiture has to do with the nature of translation itself: given the problematic nature of “meaning,” we have to regard translation as, at best, difficult or, at worst, impossible. If you were a deconstructionist, you might see your task as translator to enhance the discomfiture; if you were a Quinean or a Davidsonian, you would reassure us, on behaviorist or pragmatist ground, that translation does indeed take place, no matter what one does with “meaning.” Shifting the locus of the problem to translation, however, has the consequence of evading the real source of the discomfiture, which, I want to argue, stems from the transformation of *adhyatma* into philosophy. Translation contributes to this transformation. The discomfiture will not go away until we realize that we may have to choose between *adhyatma* and philosophy.

The term *adhyatma* captures a distinctive kind of reflection on experience that is not specific to any one Indian tradition. When Gandhi, for example, refused to distinguish Buddhism from the traditions normally classified as Hinduism, I imagine this to be his reasoning. Each tradition practices that reflection in its own way. Therefore, while for convenience I might today use categories such as Buddhism, Jainism, or Bhakti tradition, I want to depart radically from what those classifications mean in the “philosophical” and “Indological” literature on Indian traditions. Given our concern with “translation,” it would be appropriate to begin our elaboration of the seemingly simple characterization of Indian traditions as preoccupied with reflection on experience by noting that “translation” as a problematic never figured in that reflection. None of the debates about poetics or *kavya* even remotely or obliquely talk about translation.<sup>8</sup> Doubtless, we appreciate the significance of this absence comparatively, that is, in relation to the obsessive preoccupation with translation in the Western intellectual traditions. However, once we register the significance of its absence, it is not hard to realize that it has to do with the nature of what we have been calling “practical reflection” or “reflection on experience.” Let’s begin from the other end and ask why translation/interpretation is such an obsessive problematic for the West. It clearly has to do with the importance of Revelation for Christianity as a religion. In fact, rich and prolix body of discourse we call theology exists solely to explain the “existence” of this extraordinary event and to interpret the “text” of revelation in order to transmit the “experience” of faith. This text has to be maximally consistent and its intent and meaning has to be deciphered correctly, a challenging and perhaps impossible task given the finitude and failings of the readers. And a disturbing issue that emerges inevitably is: how other tongues, especially the pagan ones, can “correctly” translate the message of this text

without diluting or distorting or otherwise profaning the sacred word. The ones left out of the privileged community have to be saved by conveying the Truth to them but what if their language obscures or worse falsifies the Truth? So, we have here the generation of interpretation/translation as a problem of theological hermeneutics; the power of the problem and the strategies of tackling it are later carried over to “secular” disciplines dealing with texts—literary or philosophical—and their meaning. The relationship between philosophy and theology is a complex one, since philosophy—the Greek experience, as Heidegger would say—precedes theology but the latter fundamentally shapes the former from the early Middle Ages, as again Heidegger often notes and bemoans (Heidegger, 1959: 13). No matter how “secular” modern or even contemporary philosophy and its divisions (morality, epistemology, and ontology) sound, at bottom, its problems are derived from theological concerns. So, translation/interpretation/commentary carries over the theologically determined model to the organization of philosophy and its auxiliary branches too. There are activities that are parasitic, second-rate, and yet unavoidable and even indispensable. In fact, one could argue that the problem of interpretation/translation is caught in the theological working out of the Christological dilemma, since the latter arises because the Christ nature can only be revealed to a community and yet the truth of that has to be universalized even if that requires the shedding of the particularity of the Christ figure and the message he embodies.<sup>9</sup> Translation, the ultimate parasitic activity, is, therefore, always regarded in the West as a betrayal but a necessary one.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, what we find in India are different forms of preserving reflections on experience. When Gandhi takes to the *Gita* he does so because it is, as he puts it, someone’s experience and hence repeatable. That is to say, he is able to see it as someone’s reflection that helps in clarifying experience. Of course, by the time Gandhi reads the *Gita*, the theological frame of European scholars and colonial institutions has turned it into a “religious” text closest by some reckoning to the Bible (after all a god-figure is offering his discourse to a human-figure), one of the three important “texts” of Hindu religion/theology/philosophy. The powerful classificatory enterprise of Western hermeneutics had slotted the epics as Indian mythology, the *Vedas* as in part theology and metaphysics and in part philosophy. This was “classical” Hinduism to which was counter-posed the “popular” Hinduism of the *Bhakti* traditions. What about the tradition of commentary (*Bhashya* and *Karica*) on the central texts? Aren’t they very much like the Biblical hermeneutics? They can indeed be made to appear that way if we look through the theological frame.<sup>11</sup> If we, as a thought experiment, try to set aside that frame and try to grasp the variety of traditions—ranging from the *advaita vedanta* with its triumvirate of “texts” to *vachanakaras* of 12th century, from *Kashmiri Saivism* to *Bauls* of Bengal (as Tagore was so keen to insist), reflection on experience is recognizably the organizing focus of them, but we would be hard put to show any central or foundational “texts” for them. With the help

of the theological frame, we could perhaps try to constitute a “text” for them or even constitute them as texts, as the Indological enterprise has even now been busy doing. However, making sense of the texts seems an activity that can hardly be found except in some traditions, precisely the ones that the Western scholarship has held up as “classical” Hinduism. As I pointed out earlier, it is not difficult to understand why the West constructed these entities to make sense of a culture that otherwise seemed bewilderingly different: understanding the “text” is a matter of reinforcing the *faith* in an Event, which is like no other event. In contrast, for Indian traditions, text, if this entity could be said to exist, is an aid to understand experience. Let’s remember that it is the Vedantic tradition, supposedly text-centric, that regards *Vedas* themselves as potential *vaasana*. So, there has been translation/interpretation of the “texts” of Indian traditions within the theological frame, but no understanding of the traditions from which these texts have been extracted.<sup>12</sup> Contrary, then, to the well-known Davidsonian dictum, translation/interpretation need not yield understanding of the other, especially when that activity construes the other as a variation of itself. This may appear a familiar story making a familiar point. The story may well be familiar, but the point is not. The bland constructivism that seems to have attained the status of a scholarly dogma has actually obscured the point and its consequences. The West constructed, invented “Hinduism” means just that, namely the latter is an experiential entity for the West; evidence shows that it experienced Indian culture in that way. That does not mean that “Hinduism” has now come to exist (ontologically real, as it were). It still is an imaginary entity in the ontological (or any other) sense of non-existing.<sup>13</sup> That is, I hope, as clear as I can make it. What has created havoc in the meantime is the dogma I mentioned above, according to which all things are invented, constructed, imagined, and so is “Hinduism.”<sup>14</sup> One has heard that the Christian God is powerful, but one hadn’t quite realized that his power endowed the religious culture he brought forth the further power of creating religions at will! So, if you accept this dogma (or more likely presuppose it without realizing one is doing so since it is the common-sense), you have no way of appreciating the point I have been making about how things look if one accepts the theological frame. Whether it is the larger point about “Hinduism” as a religion or the regimentation of Indian thought along the familiar lines of Western philosophical disciplines, there is no reason to think that the frame is inescapable or compulsory. As long as that frame is firmly in place, and I believe it still governs the disciplines we are concerned with here, our discomfiture with the translation/interpretation will persist.

A framework distilled out of the self-understanding of Christian Europe was used to make sense of the intellectual and cultural world of India. This is a perfectly sensible and an entirely defensible strategy for the West, of course, since there is perhaps no other way to begin understanding another culture. The classificatory structures they used and the entities they postulated no doubt made experiential sense to Europeans. The only question that has not

been addressed at all satisfactorily is why this frame has persisted even now when its disciplinary structures (I will not call it learnings) simply fail to capture the cultural learnings and saliences of Indians that underlie the stories, the reflections, the practices that got so drastically regimented in that frame?<sup>15</sup> But persist it has; whether or not the revelation has reached everyone, the theological/philosophical frame has imposed its structures and terminologies everywhere. Although we can always come up with exceptions such as Gandhi whose access to the reflection on experience is not distorted by that frame or the terminology it brings; in the academic world, it is indeed rare to find someone resisting the talk of Indian soteriology, Indian religious texts, Indian myths, leave alone the academically respectable field classification such as Buddhist epistemology, *Advaita* metaphysics, Jain morality, and so on. The terminological issues may be secondary, though they are far from insignificant, but the formulation of the problematics is not. If the latter fails to capture the cultural saliences, or, worse, presents what is unrecognizable to the reader as a problem, one's intuition remains unengaged or is drastically misled. After all, what one calls intuition in this context is what results from the transmission of cultural learning; and once that transmission is disrupted, over time, the cultural learning itself goes mute, leaving the disciplinary practitioners of philosophy without any intuitions.<sup>16</sup> Cultural learning and disciplinary practice have never come together in the case of philosophy in India. So, we have here a complicated structure of parasitism: the practitioners have perhaps unwittingly become parasitic on a discipline presumably for some cognitive gain which they are yet to realize, but the discipline itself, like a true parasite, is harming the nourishing soil, the cultural learning whose concepts and problematic as an intellectual discipline it should have been articulating.

Taking my cue from Gandhi's use of the *Gita* and, more generally, his engagement with Indian thought, I want to show that we can only fully understand the source of our discomfiture with the translation of the concepts of Indian thought when we realize that reflection on experience has its sole focus the removal of structures of parasitism that inhibit and distort experience. A corollary of this large argument that has implication for translation is that instead of worrying about how to render *upadhi* and *maya* in English, we need to think of forms of parasitism and its self-concealment. That way, we will begin to understand how Indian traditions directed us to reflect on experience. Translation of Indian thought, even if possible, in some obvious sense, may not be the route to re-appropriate Indian thought. Although Gandhi, as I remarked earlier, borrows the terminology that came with the new frame, his intuition was seeking to use the resources of the traditions in consonance with the cultural learning underlying those traditions. When he sought, therefore, to understand the effect of colonialism on Indians, he wanted to analyze the obstacles to self-knowledge. He realized that the structures of parasitism that colonialism was busy creating had contributed further to those obstacles by actively interfering in the transmission of what I have been calling the cultural learning. Gandhi was, of course, thinking of the

separation between practice and learning rather than the much narrower problem of discipline and learning that concerns us here; the diagnosis, however, remains relevant. We must freshly wonder again at the striking novelty or, depending on your perspective, the complete oddity of Gandhi's route of inquiry into colonialism. When he formulated *swaraj* or self-knowledge as the only way of understanding and resisting colonialism, he was in effect practicing *adhyatma* or reflection on experience. As he readily confessed, he had very little "knowledge" of Indian "philosophy." He wasn't concerned about how to translate *Atman* or *Maya* or *sat*, nor about their metaphysical or ontological character. Although he did not set out his reasoning in any detail, he realized that Indian thought concerns itself with ethical action (a pleonastic expression if we follow Gandhi's *Gita*) without metaphysics or ontology. If we want to term it philosophy, it's philosophy as activity.

What kind of activity is it? In one formulation, we could say that it is an activity that aims to fully realize experience. When talking about reflection on experience, it is important to realize that we invariably use experience to refer to what occurs or happens (*bhava*) as well as to the result of the activity of assimilating or understanding what happens, what we undergo (*anubhava*).<sup>17</sup> How to turn the happenings—sad or happy, ordinary or extraordinary, natural or social—into experience constitutes the *adhyatmic* inquiry. Clearly, there are any number of ways of saliently what is important and how to transform that into experience. I have coined the term *practitional matrix* to conceptualize experiential inquiry that characterizes the Indian intellectual traditions. The thought behind it is something like this: action is always action in a matrix, like a gesture in a dance, sound in a *raaga*, or offering in a ritual. You learn to appease the ancestors and that involves engaging the past in a *practitional matrix*; you express your gratitude to the implements that have helped in your interaction with the world, so *ayudha puja* is a *practitional matrix* that engages the implements. Since there are no events or occurrences that are by themselves trivial or significant and there may be multiple ways of engaging each event or aspect or dimension of what occurs, diversity of practices is a given. That is why too the diversity of Indian traditions. The central inquiry though is about awareness or self-consciousness—realizing the *atman* is the way one tradition speaks of it (*Vedantins*), another might speak of "standing in awareness" (*arivinalli niluvu*, a phrase used by *vachanakaras* writing in Kannada), but none speak of it as a "religious" or "mystical" event only manifest to some, which none can actually attain, as is the case with monasticization in Christianity. The theological or normative frame has, unfortunately, turned the talk of *atman* into some sort of revelation, and the Bhakti traditions (the so-called popular Hinduism) have been accorded the mystic status.

Every element that is potentially a way of completing experience is also a way in which experience could get distorted or occluded altogether. An architect concerned with understanding how space can enhance living or relationship of those who inhabit it begins to be parasitic on the real estate sector's

exploitation of land for selling phantasmatic ideas of living. A singer begins to make her musical pursuit secondary to the fame concerts bring in. A politician begins to love his own exploits for the rewards and fame it brings in. A scientist becomes enamored of the junketing that international collaborations bring in. These are not unusual examples by any means since any of us could be or are in that position. What it highlights is the peculiar structure of parasitism. Doing things for fame or making the latter motivate your pursuit has ways of occluding and perhaps terminating the really important thing, namely the pursuit itself, because the phantasy supporting the desire conceals the parasitic structure. This is the case even if you are a human being not pursuing anything like science or music. The texture of the relationships could come under strain as you get caught in a phantasmatic conception of yourself as say attractive or tough and so on. What the parasitism ultimately occludes is experience that enables you to have self-knowledge. When Gandhi began to see that colonialism had begun to create parasitism through, for example, medicine, law, and the state and that these institutions were distorting or occluding experience, he was not distinguishing, as Marxists and Liberals were to do later, colonialism as some material process with no effect on experience (taken in a narrow sense as subjective). The violence of colonialism, he realized, consisted in very deeply fragmenting the saliences that had organized the practical matrix, thereby in the long run undermining the very integrity of experience. His attempt to reorganize the saliences drew from the same resources that had indeed enabled him to see how the violence of colonialism had a disintegrating effect on experience itself.<sup>18</sup> Stripped of the practical matrix, actions tended to be automatism, occurrences and incidents traumatic. The result was perhaps the last great concept to come out of Indian traditions, namely, *satyagraha*, yet another concept that can indeed be translated (as it has been), but the translation “truth force” simply makes no sense as it equates an epistemic concept of “truth,” with an ontological one, “*sat*”, if one may put it that way to make the contrast vivid; could the structure and activities that have become parasitic be transformed through *satyagraha* into sites of learning? How can new sites of learning be brought into being so that the automatism of actions and trauma of occurrences be transformed into experience, and the phantasy that conceals the parasitic nature and perpetuates desire be therapeutically engaged if not removed? The crucial concept here is that of sites of learning. There is no limit to the kind of practical learnings there can be which enables one to transform structures, occurrences, emotions into experiences. The body, time, relationships, place—all these can turn into *upadhis* or they could be transformed into sites of learning. And what is a site of leaning for one tradition may not be a site of learning for another or not in the same way. Erotics is way of learning for one tradition (think of *Tantric* traditions), for another, it is austerity of a certain kind.

The concept “practical matrix” enables us to understand the way experiential knowledge works and why it is necessarily an ever-expanding

field. It helps us model how the rich traditions of *kavyas* and *shastras* emerge in the process of tackling multiple aspects of living, whether it is engaging with the past, arranging the living space, appreciating beauty, incorporating consideration of taste and health, elaborating erotics, and so on. The cultural learning that this process creates does not consist in any doctrine it yields (the *shastras* are not doctrines) but structures ways of doing things, practical knowledge, in short. What the process also produces is what we might term action-theoretic concepts, that is, concepts that one understands only by understanding their function in the matrix.<sup>19</sup> Concepts such as *manana*, *shravana*, *nididhyāsana*, or *upadhi*, *avidya*, *maya* too are action-theoretic concepts; they are not (metaphysical or ontological) descriptions of the world. Looking for translation of them as though they are descriptions (even if metaphysical) of the world has the effect of turning them into obscure, mystic, religious entities. Entities in the world do not come with *upadhi* written over them, for instance. Whether my body or my past becomes an *upadhi* depends on my relationship to it. Nor is any entity, action, or discipline parasitic in itself. When for example I become parasitic on fame? How am I supposed to understand “fame”? What kind of an *upadhi* is it? What makes it one? If, however, we want to understand how *upadhi* functioned in *advaita*, we do better by trying to understand parasitism in our contemporary experience. Are we thereby translating *upadhi*? Or are we drawing on Indian thought to understand ourselves critically? Does recognizing the self-concealment of parasitic structures and activities help us understand why *maya* was such a powerful insight?

Finally, to return briefly to the choice *adhyatma* or philosophy: my claim has been that there is disjuncture between the practice of the discipline of philosophy and the cultural learning that underlies Indian thought and its diverse paths of organizing reflection on experience. This raises a large and difficult question about whether this claim implies that Western philosophy (and Indian Philosophy as a branch of it) is inimical to experience or, less strongly, at least to certain ways of reflecting on it. Although the context of Indian thought regimented by philosophy has forced this way of formulating the question, it does nevertheless throw light on why there has been a significant strand of thinking within Western philosophy—from Marx and Nietzsche to Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Foucault—which has sought the end of philosophy.<sup>20</sup> It may well be that the destruction of the past goes hand in hand with the destruction of experience, if indeed it is not the same process. The unease generated by this process must have registered at some level and in some form in Western thinking.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, both philosophy and history come to be regarded with profound distrust by most of these thinkers. May be our attempt—following Gandhi—to bring to bear the cultural learning on the practice of philosophy provides a different, experiential route to that task. Worrying about interpretation/translation of concepts of Indian thought, however, will keep us within the fold of Western philosophy, making us parasitic without us realizing it.

## Home

From real estate to philosophy, being parasitic means to be homeless. There was a time not so long ago when being at home meant being literally open to the world. In villages and even towns, once the door was opened in the morning, it would remain open till nightfall. We can take a historical view and argue that that arrangement depended on the way work was distributed and on patriarchy and so on. Even so one would be hard put to deny a conception of home that was still at work, that was if you like part of the cultural learning. In that conception, home meant openness to the world, a place where the structure of learning through experience—what I have called the practical matrix—was put in place. By making the past external to us, history denies such learning. It is historicized away as nostalgia. We glibly say that past cannot be retrieved, without realizing that we are disowning learning in our confused attempt to be historical. We regard figures such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Ramana Maharshi as mystics and even if we feel certain awe toward them, we conceal that with expression of condescension. Gandhi gets treated as a benign father of the nation, his thought and action finding no resonance in our thinking. Both history and philosophy, the new tools we proudly use, render them alien to us. We discuss concepts such as *atman* and *upadhi* in the same way as we write commentaries on Hegel's essence and appearance or, as we saw in Chapter 3, misappropriate "political society" and "civil society." Without knowing how to understand the two traditions, we treat both traditions as charlatans. If history renders the past external and "factual," philosophy insulates experience from reflection.

We are at home in thinking when our cultural learning is made available for articulation either as practices or as theories. When, however, the disciplines of the human sciences actually make us disavow our cultural learning, and do so, moreover, without offering any new learning, we have no choice but to begin the slow work of re-understanding education as setting up of sites of learning, to recover, create, nurture, and articulate our cultural learnings.

## Notes

- 1 In Bangalore today, we are offered every possible "dwelling"—Mediterranean, Californian, New York style, etc., everything except the homely Bangalorean way, which either does not exist or the advertising industry has no use for it.
- 2 One can think of any number of examples, from the IT and biotechnology industries, which have exploited the market without in any way contributing to the growth of research, to the flourishing art-market, which again contributes very little to creating institutions. This is not the place to undertake what would otherwise be a necessary analysis of this creaming-off phenomenon in post-colonial India.
- 3 Without scrutinizing its epistemic credentials, people tend to assume that it would be committing genetic fallacy to point out history's obvious connection with theology. When Nandy in his powerful and pioneering essay (1995) wonders why history is not reflexive enough to critique itself so that it can realize the dangers of historical consciousness, the answer has to do with the fact that history in its

secular guise has not been able to replace its theological assumptions or premises. That has to be the response also to those attracted by historical inquiry and narrative, ask why we cannot have both *itihasa* and history. Within the comparative science of cultures' ambit, the only way to argue for historiography is to show that historiography does not inherit any property from theology and that it is indeed an intellectual discipline or resource that contributes to the project of comparative science of cultures. The latter is not interested in writing a history of (any aspect of) the West or of India. It has set itself the task of building a story of how a people come to be that people. But that's a story of how a configuration of learning emerges through different dynamics (Balagangadhara 2012b).

- 4 Unveiling the bust of Basaveshwara in London in 2015, prime minister Narendra Modi declared that much before Britain Basavanna had “mooted” the Magna Carta! Lord Macauley must have given a contented smile from his grave. Not only had Britain colonized the past of India, it was even earning revenue from it (Karnataka government paying for the bust and the piece of land on which the bust stands). Of course, this can be an ironic and if depressing metaphor for Indians still learning about themselves from the British institutions and also paying for it. The Leftist view is no less grotesque: Basavanna fighting for the rights of the depressed castes, Akkamahadevi as the proto-feminist, and so on.
- 5 Hayden White (2014) too agrees that we have to choose between the past and history, because (as he put it in his personal communication dated February 18, 2015) history brings with it too many prepackaged presuppositions and premises to be re-made for liberation purposes. I think that Oakeshott doesn't quite realize, like Nietzsche and Foucault obliquely did and as Balagangadhara and Nandy explicitly do, that one cannot have both a historical past and a practical past, that the former will destroy the latter. Indeed, one could argue that when history begins to destroy the past, the practical past will be forced to use the historical past to enact the kind of “farce” Marx famously talked about.
- 6 If you want to destroy the past of a culture, Balagangadhara argues, give it history. Ashis Nandy (1995) makes the same point when he argues for alternative *to* history rather than alternative histories (always in the plural, of course) favored by the cultural left. What implication does Balagangadhara's claim have for our understanding of the only truly historical culture we know, namely the West?
- 7 I say “perhaps” mainly because it is unclear if the modal intuitions underlying the work on modal logic are universally shared.
- 8 See Rao (2014: Ch. 8) for an illuminating discussion of this claim.
- 9 On the importance of the Christological dilemma for understanding the dynamic of Christianity as a religion, see the indispensable work by Balagangadhara (1994).
- 10 As Salman Rushdie playfully suggests in his *Midnight's Children*, the dark-blue, playful pagan god Krishna could be used in evangelization to illustrate the Christ figure, but the danger obviously is that the latter might end up becoming just another avatar, even if somehow the immorality and deceitfulness associated with Krishna could be overlooked!
- 11 I have called it the quasi-cognitive/normative frame and contrasted it with the actional frame of Indian traditions, what I elaborate as “practical matrix.”
- 12 When Derrida undertook to deconstruct the transcendental signifieds of Western philosophy, it's remarkable that he had to claim the world as a text! To claim that “There is nothing outside the text” is therefore a deeply theological move, no matter how playful or ironic it is supposed to be. It would not be out of place, therefore, to propose, playfully and ironically, of course, a claim such as: There is no “text” in Indian traditions.
- 13 Even Ian Hacking (1999), otherwise so acute, misses the point when he discusses constructivism. To add further confusion to an already muddled doctrine, he

introduces a category called interacting kind. Thus, if we apply his scheme to the case at hand, not only the invented religion “Hinduism” conveniently comes to exist (be ontologically real), by interaction with it, people become that category. It’s all rather mysterious what property the invented kind has and how it lends that property to those interacting with it. Perhaps constructivism does indeed possess more powers than what even the most ardent theologians could not hope to find in religion.

- 14 Nicholas Dirks’ *Castes of Mind* (2001) is a near perfect enactment of the confusion created by the dogmatic application of constructivism.
- 15 This is the major shortcoming of the “hipkapi” account provided by Balagangadhara (2012a: 53). I diagnose the deeper source of this problem in the concluding chapter.
- 16 For an illustration, see my discussion of Matilal in Chapter 3.
- 17 The term “experience” will now have connotations that cannot be restricted to “past experience, accumulated knowledge” and “current experience, sensory or sensory like,” which according to the linguist Wierzbicka constitutes the cultural legacy of English (Wierzbicka, 2010).
- 18 Chapter 3 sets out a framework, drawn largely from Tagore and Gandhi, which allows us to see how both these thinkers insist on seeking explanations of the Indian predicament, its indistinction, its having disintegrated into facts, from within the actional frame, so that the very activity goes toward making the frame distinct, even as the explanation offered illuminates what has rendered India indistinct and helps in seeking ways to strengthen the *dharmic* activity. The actional frame is what Tagore calls the rhythm of *dharmic activity* that helps “assimilate truth.”
- 19 There is nothing mysterious in this: think of “cover drive” or “square-cut” which cannot be understood except by having some understanding of the practical matrix, namely cricket, within which that concept/action has sense. Of course, the game analogy has limitations in that the rules have an instrumental role, whereas action in a practice is not rule bound in that way (see the discussion of Wittgenstein’s rule following in Chapter 1). Bernard Williams once contrasted thin concept such as “right” with thick concepts that are action-guiding and world-guided. His claim was that under the sway of morality, thick concepts are disappearing. The action-theoretic concepts of the practical world fit the bill better because they are truly action-guiding and world-guided (Williams, 1985: 143–45).
- 20 It is not surprising that I have drawn on all these thinkers (except Heidegger, whose idiom and style I find too unwieldly) to foreground the problematic of practical knowledge.
- 21 Historians such as Pierre Nora (1989) have expressed their grave concern that the historical activity of constructing memorials and monuments—*the lieux de mémoire*—seems to be adversely affecting the *milieu de mémoire*.

## 8 Conclusion

### Deformation of the Practical and the Categorial Error

See my forms, Partha ...

(*The Bhagavad Gita*, xi: 4)

It's time to bring together the concepts that have played a critical role in the arguments so far—sites of learning, experience-occlusion, practical matrix, normativity, ontologically peculiar entities—for a systematic elucidation of the issue of practical knowledge and practical form of life. The elucidation will take the form of a conceptual story about our life with concepts and what has made it strange. The story, let's recall, began with our attempt to understand cultures as configurations of learning, which consists of theoretical and practical mode of going about in the world. Christianity as a religion created the dominance of theoretical mode of learning over the practical, whereas in India (and Asia, more generally) ritual has made the practical mode dominant. This abstract sketch remained in the background as an explanatory hypothesis, while we took concrete forays into understanding the trajectory of secularization (one of the twin dynamics of the universalization of religion, the other being proselytization) and characterizing the practical matrixes. The story about concepts and their fate mediates between the abstract sketch and the (relatively) more concrete forays we have undertaken, while revising and recasting the sketch and at the same time deepening our understanding of both secularization as the normativization of domains of practical life and practical matrix as the elaboration of ethical action. Let's see how the two strands of the story come together and find a resolution:

- 1 Orientalism created or constructed entities: ontologically peculiar, in my terms, *hipkapi* in Balagangadhara's, both referring to the experiential entities of Westerners. My suggestion was that the ontologically peculiar entities are to be found in Western self-description as well and not only in their other-description. If true, this has profound consequences for our understanding of Western culture, for our meta-theory of Western theories. More importantly, we can begin to glimpse the very concrete possibility of an alternative conceptualization of India.

2 My account of the emergence of the ontologically peculiar entities draws attention to the *nature* of the different kinds of concepts at play; the account simultaneously calls for a revision and refinement of the configuration of learning hypothesis about cultural difference. If the practical and ethical are co-terminus in India, in the West, the moral has colonized and distorted the practical. If the practical is not so evident on the surface of social life in the West, that's because of the scientism of the human sciences (the result of secularization of morality). The practical, however, can never entirely disappear because of the irreducible presence of action in any domain. Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, has either completely disappeared or survives in distorted form in arid treatises on morality, at one extreme, and in varieties psycho-babble, at other extreme. The situation in India is far more ambiguous and tangled. The presence of the quasi-theoretical/evaluative frame has begun to distort the domain of the practical. Although the colonial violence that imposed normative frame on Indians is no longer present, the violence intrinsic to the normative frame is perpetuated by the cognitive enslavement of Indians to that frame. Practical reflections too, as we saw, begin to be filtered through the normative frame, thus rendering the domain of the practical mute. With Gandhi, we explicitly formulated the task of rendering the practical life vibrant again. The question for a practical epistemology of Indian thought would be how to bring practical reflection/experiential knowledge together with the practical domain. That is to say, to use my terminology, how can action be practical again, life be philosophical (*adhyatmic*) again?

### Practical Epistemology and the Categorial Error

My question is clearly premised on the assumption that there's nothing paradoxical in the attempt to reconstruct and then to redevelop the logical/conceptual world and the structure of a tradition or traditions that have evolved skills, heuristic, and concepts to practically transmit certain way of living, which I am calling the philosophical life. It's not a recreation or a revival of a form of life understood sociologically or anthropologically, as a certain historicist tradition of Marxism or progressivist/whiggish idea would construe it and therefore criticize it as "reactionary," as an attempt to turn the wheel of history backward and so on (thoughts appropriate to agrarian, rural life of small communities, etc.). Indology/Orientalism had tied almost all aspects of Indian thought, mostly negatively evaluated, to the social structures. As far as I know, this state of affairs has not been questioned and it has faded into the background, as something obviously true. We need to understand how this picture comes about and why it has tenaciously persisted in Western thought. For now, I want to simply reject this assumption or picture and explore the unexpected or counter-intuitive idea that Indian thought is, in the broadest sense we can give to it, *logical* in nature.

Whether we take at one end of the spectrum “*atman*,” assigned to metaphysics, or, at the other end, “*varnashrama*,” always construed sociologically or anthropologically, we radically shift their categorial status by placing them in the space opened up by the conjoining of logic and practical thought. They are what Michael Thompson (whose ground-breaking work is the inspiration for what follows here) terms “form-concepts,” like Frege’s “concept,” “object,” “relation,” or Thompson’s own “life-form,” “action,” “practice,” etc. (Thompson, 2008). What does it mean to say that a concept is a form-concept? It is to be distinguished, on the one hand, from experience-near concepts like “rock” or “grass” and, on the other hand, from experience-mediating or theoretical concepts like “quantum state,” “quark,” or “mode of production” (Thompson, 2008: 6). Positively, it expresses the “unity” of judgments or predication in the sphere it governs:

Each concept catches a particular type of ‘unity’, as we might equally say: a unity through which the things united can at the same time in some sense be understood. Philosophical comprehension of the concepts in question will come from grasping the specific character of this form or unity in each case.

(Thompson, 2008: 11)

Thus “life-form” enables us to understand the peculiar quantifier-less, a-temporal predication we see in natural-historical judgments such as “bobcats breed in spring”; the temporality specific to the aspectual predication in the sphere of “action” helps us grasp “event form” and “process form”: the generality and actuality of practices such as promise-keeping that needs to be understood non-empirically, defying both psychology and sociology, practices that constitute the sphere of “form of life.” The distinctiveness of “form-concepts,” what sets them apart from “rock” or “quark,” consists precisely in this that their “contentfullness” (the content of the form, if you like) is accessible to reflection, that is to say, “they can be explained or comprehended precisely through a reflection on forms of thought or judgement.” They can be said to arise with experience, not from experience (Thompson, 2008: 14, 20).

What makes it plausible, nay compelling, to see concepts of Indian thought—such as *atman*, *brahman*, *dharma*, *maya*, concept clusters of *antahkarana*, etc.—as form-concepts is the deep nexus it enables us to see between (logical) inquiry, practical knowledge, and self-consciousness, while simultaneously affording a richer understanding of each of them. And this nexus illuminates the sense in which Indian thought glosses *atman* as *jnana-svarupa* or even *jnana* as *svarupa* itself. Another powerful case could be made by showing how this perspective enables us to make sense of *adhyasa* as a logical error or mistake. Before we go there, however, we confront the massive task of arranging, as it were, the logical geography of these concepts of Indian thought. My hunch is that we undertake this task without paying attention to thinkers, periods, or texts. Such a logical geography of concepts would also

reveal the extent to which these concepts are still present in our languages (*samsara*, *prapanca*, *ahamkara*, *dharma*, etc.). This is a large challenging collective project. I will not try to say anything more here about how such a task could be executed; I will take for granted the viability and necessity of such a project. Let me instead try to draw two or three important implications of the categorial shift I'm advocating.

Perhaps the most consequential implication involves how we think about what I call the ontologically peculiar entities and which Balagangadhara has been calling "*hipkapis*." I have always thought that one aspect of *hipkapi* idea is nearly as vacuous as the social constructivist idea of cultural practices and traditions. Although there is a convincing cultural explanation about why *hipkapis* are constructed, there isn't a coherent story about how they get constructed, why they persist even for those who cannot experience it. A very attractive and illuminating account of these entities emerges if we combine the idea of form-concepts with practical epistemology. Central to the latter is the claim that there is a distinctive kind of knowledge that is non-observational, to be distinguished from observational knowledge, central to theory and science. Developing Elizabeth Anscombe's idea of intentional action within the setting of Aristotelian *phronetic* knowledge, Thompson states:

I will be attempting to make out a parallel between two relations. First, there is the relation between my knowledge of my intentional action or anscombely done doings, on the one hand—my practical knowledge in Anscombe's sense—and the action known, on the other hand, the one I am in the process of performing intentionally or anscombely. Second, there is the relation between practical understanding or wisdom, and what *it* in some sense knows, or knows in a certain way, namely human life somehow taken generally, or, if you like, how to live it. In each case, there is a kind of knowledge of these things—what I'm doing in the one case, and specifically human life on the other (the kind of life I'm living, so to speak)—that is empirical and external. But in each case there is another knowledge, which is, if you like “from the inside.” (This is of course an inept expression, which is must be replaced in further reflection.) It is in either case in some sense *productive of the things known*, and is thus practical.<sup>1</sup>

(Thompson, 2013: 714)

Thus, we arrive at the core insight of *phronetic* or practical knowledge, namely, “what is known depends on the knowledge for its actuality” (or, more emphatically, “it is clear that the thing known only exists if the knowledge of it does”) and what is known is known through form-concepts (Thompson, 2013: 717, 718, 729). It is a natural extension from here to see practice, constituted by action/knowledge/form, as, if you like, a knowledge-entity. When the perspective of the other variety of knowledge, observational knowledge, is brought to bear on the practice/knowledge-entity,<sup>2</sup> the

ground is prepared for the emergence of the ontologically peculiar entities. If observational knowledge alone brings to bear its perspective on practice/knowledge, what results may be akin (not identical) to what *adhyasa* brings about, namely, form being covered over by what bears it. However, when this theoretical perspective is modulated or inflected normatively, that is to say, when the entity it bears upon is seen as “false” or as violating a norm, the false or normed entities come into being as ontologically peculiar entities. They are not entirely arbitrarily constructed entities, as the *hipkapi* account would construe them. What happens in this process is that either the forms are completely overlooked—as in the creation of the false religion “Hinduism” (it’s well to remember that before “religion” became the essential element and pride of all cultures, they were created as the false other of the true religions, that is Christianity and also to some extent by Islam) or are deformed by turning form-concepts into theoretical entities, as in the creation of “the caste-system” (in India and “sexuality” in the West itself). There is clearly a profound, even epoch turning error involved here. Has it really gone undetected? Not quite. Recall the brilliant discussion in *Heathen* of the encounters of the early Christians with the pagans on the cobbled streets of Rome. Asked to prove the ancientness of their practice, these Christians shifted the terms of the debate and claimed that they were the recipients of the true doctrine of indeed the Truth. Armed with Truth, they started predinating truth and falsity of pagan practices. Balagangadhara terms this a category mistake, one that turned out to be, as we saw in Chapter 1, “a stroke of genius.” Unfortunately, none of the terms in play in the characterization of this encounter—practice, truth/falsity/category mistake—received the proper treatment needed to make full sense of what Christianity as a religion was doing. Furthermore, is the existing account of category mistake adequate to conceptualize what transpires in this encounter? Is the category of truth and falsity moral rather than epistemic? My sense is that whatever account we have of “category mistake” is not adequate to the task. When I say I see only buildings and people engaged in various activities but no university, to use Gilbert Ryle’s famous example (1949: 16–17), or when I once asked a well-known sociologist from Turkey if she is a Marxist and she protested “no, no, no, I am a sociologist,” she is (and perhaps I am too) committing a category mistake. Even though these examples highlight the oddity involved, it turns out that it is far from clear how to give a formal account of the oddity or mistake.<sup>3</sup> What I am terming categorial error results when “form-concepts” are normed into “concepts-in-a-theory” and used to refer to or designate an “empirical object,” process, or structure.

We may still be no nearer to a proper understanding of the emergence of normativity, that is, its relationship to religion as an explanatorily intelligible account of the cosmos and itself. If, however, the account above is roughly on the right lines, we will have to revise the theory of cultural difference. The picture of culture as configuration of learning which is shaped by whether theoretical or practical knowledge plays a dominant role in it has to be given

up since practical knowledge is fundamental to all cultures and threatened in all cultures too, not so much by theoretical knowledge as the quasi-theoretical force of normativity. While *Heathen* does not deny that both knowledges are present in all cultures, the symmetrical picture it sketches of how a culture acquires its identity depending on which knowledge is dominant and which is subordinated does not pay any attention to the structure of practical knowledge and its centrality to humans as a species, equipping them to apprehend the natural world and the cultural world and at the same time this apprehension requiring self-consciousness, however implicit it may remain. What is involved here is, in a deep sense, a logical insight that allows us to delineate the formal functioning of practical knowledge, whether that involves apprehending forms of organisms in the natural world of life-form and process-forms and event-forms or the generality of practices that constitute the forms of life. As Thompson puts it:

On our premises, then, the self-knower in apprehending such things is always and everywhere relating himself to his form. In representing any animal as thinking or as in pain, I bring it to a certain formally distinctive unity; in representing it as bearing self-knowledge in respect of these things, I represent the animal as bringing itself to a unity of the same type. *Self-consciousness is always implicitly form consciousness.*

(Thompson, 2013: 727; emphasis added)

Thompson's account highlights the nexus, to use his favorite phrase, between self-knowledge, self-consciousness, and form-consciousness that is so crucial to understanding practical knowledge and that distinguishes it so fundamentally from theoretical knowledge. Form-concepts and concepts-of-themselves governed processes that constitute actions, and practices are *a priori* and they are apprehended as such. However, the unity of the diverse judgments at any determinate level are apprehended in diverse ways which is displayed in the unity of self-predication: "My thinking might thus relate to any such unity or universal in diverse ways" (Thompson, 2013: 723). What this shows is the distinctiveness of practical epistemology:

There must be a way of grasping the concept human, of accessing this unity, that is not a sifting of the objects of external experience. There must be way of grasping what I am calling one's form that is not an interpretation of outer experience, but that shows itself in acts of self-predication.<sup>4</sup>

(Thompson 213, 729)

Grasping actions and practices as falling under a generalization would sever them from their form-dependence. (Recall the "dumb generality" Marx criticizes.) What moralization seems to do is to simultaneously individualize and totalize,<sup>5</sup> and this process either sets aside forms or deforms them by

transforming form-concepts into theoretical entities. This is indeed what takes place when moralization or normativization begins to spread in the West. This gives us a more determinate account of the secularization process. First, knowledge (entities/practices) are bundled together and normed to create entities alien to the practical world. Second, as secularization—which involves normativization of domains of practical life—spreads, “truths” substitute for norms and render knowledge unrecognizable. The so-called social sciences, empirical social theories, or theories of social formations, whether in the West or in India, are best seen as the expression of the dynamic of secularization rather than as the product of theories, as knowledge, though they retain a quasi-theoretical structure. Entities they construct are precisely the ontologically peculiar entities, whose peculiar condition of possibility we sketched above. Would it be right then to say social science is Western orientalism about itself and orientalism is Western social science about India? I think by now we have both concrete examples and a formal structure to make that assertion not only plausible but productive. The practical epistemology that is taking shape should also help give a formal structure to the account I have given of Foucault’s and Marx’s work as giving us insight into the secularization of Western culture. What that means is that not all the theoretical works produced in the West are necessarily expressive of the dynamic of secularization; some of them yield insights into that process too, if only we know where and how to look.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, we can begin to interrogate Western intellectual traditions, its ethical and political theories, its social and psychological thought, its literary output, to understand how they are deformed by the substitution of practical thought by normativity *and* the extent to which they show even an oblique awareness of the deformation and its consequences.

### **Adhyasa**

What is the status of this reflection? Can this reflection be extended, elaborated, and deepened to confront the normed domains? With this question, I return to the question of practical reflection and its possibilities and limits. Self-knowledge or self-consciousness as form-consciousness is essentially tied to practical form of life. The traditions of experiential knowledge are an expression of the latter. To seek to understand the insights of these traditions would involve re-claiming the form-concepts and developing new, more determinate form-concepts. Wouldn’t that be the most effective way of resisting normativity? But what about the understanding of normativity and its damaging impact? Is it theoretical understanding or practical reflection? Without really directly answering that question, let me bring this reflection back to the stages, *ashramas*, of life, looking to articulate the idea of practical reflection as reflection on experience, as a philosophical life, not only for myself but as a way to make practical life viable and vibrant again. Stages of life or *ashrama* is as good a place as any to begin our attempt to re-understand what reflection on forms and form-concepts involves. Today, the concept of

*varnashrama* is hopelessly and seemingly irretrievably tangled up in the normed entity that we have come to know as “the caste-system,” forming, even, its core, as it were. As we know, there is probably no entity morally more abhorrent than “the caste-system.”

I have argued that “the caste-system” as the prized and most paradigmatic ontologically peculiar entity we have can nevertheless be seen as a dual of the practical matrix, which is my conceptual reconstruction of the way Indian socializing structures function.<sup>7</sup> With the help of the idea of practical knowledge as form-consciousness outlined here, it would be possible to arrive at a richer and more dynamic conception of the practical matrix, though I will not attempt it here. I bring it up only to foreground the idea of a dual which should help us realize the possibility of resisting normativity as an activity of the present, as a valorization of the present. If, therefore, “the caste-system” is the normed transformation of the practical matrix, its dual as it were, could we now elaborate a dual of this which would be an attempt to reclaim and re-elaborate the practical matrix? (It seems to me that Gandhi was essentially doing this in his *ashrama* practices.) First step in this reflective practice would be to ask how *ashrama*, which is an intuitively attractive concept, orients me to act. If ethical or practical concepts are both “world guided” and “action-guiding,”<sup>8</sup> what “unity” of predicate does the first stage, for instance, namely *brahmacharya*, enable me to access?

In the absence of any judgments or predicates that we can use to reflect on the stages (all we have is a ceremony some children are made to suffer through), we can nevertheless notice how the cluster of form-concepts that constitute *varnashrama* has at least two logical levels already, namely, “life-form” and “form of life” (or first nature and second nature, in another terminology). While the *ashrama* recognizes the agent as a biological creature with certain properties, it at the same time superimposes the cultural learning appropriate to whatever stage the agent sees himself/herself as occupying. As Thompson formulates it:

Among other things, I think of the agent as the bearer of a *practice*, a ‘form’ of a different sort, but nevertheless something that is potentially present in other agents, something that acts as a measure of good and bad in what bears it, and something that can account for what is reckoned good according to that measure. One turn of the categorical framework gives us the concept of a life-form or a living nature; the other gives us the concept of ‘form of life’ or a ‘second nature’. Of course the concepts of *good* and *bad* and of *account* will shift together with the associated conception of ‘form’ or ‘nature’ and the associated type of generality and general judgment; in *this* deployment, they are specifically practical.

(Thompson, 2008: 208)

I think this helps us to see *ashrama* as a logical concept having many determinate levels. The judgments we would be looking for or, in truth, creating in the future would belong to much more determinate levels than Thompson's own "life-form" and "form of life." At this moment, we cannot really say what "unity" the form *brahmacharya* will bring to our thoughts about a whole range of possible judgments (about learning, education, and commitments, as one imagines such judgments are likely to be about), thus linking the predicate-concepts to the representation of the form of, say, *brahmacharya*. These remarks in their generality should apply to *varna* as well, though for ease of exposition and intuitive plausibility, I have focused on *ashrama*. Indeed, at more determinate levels, practical reflection in *brahmacharya* cannot be undertaken without thinking about the kind of action I wish to perform to earn my living, the kind of action that suits my inclinations and aspirations and so on, that is to say, without getting oriented by *varna*. In one understanding (reflected in the translation), *brahmacharya* is "excellence in practice" (Nhat Hanh, 2012: 676). Gandhi would say that my reflection/action in *varnashrama* would bring together *swaraj*, *swadharma*, and *swadeshi*. To flesh out these ideas, make them more concrete and compelling, whether by drawing from the texts of Indian thought or by orally transmitted stories or by reflections on experience or by new stories about the present, is a collective task of drawing the logical geography of Indian concepts for use in the present. What I have done so far, which, of course, needs much greater elaboration and defense, is to show the radical possibilities that are opened up when we make the categorial shift of recognizing the logical nature of Indian thought. A richer and deeper understanding of how Indian thought realized that nature without seemingly having or needing logic in the contemporary sense that Thompson employs has to be achieved in order to grasp how the varied dimensions and domains of life were made learnable and teachable *practically*. Can we re-cognize and reconstruct these sites of learning? Such an understanding is indeed within our reach; because of that we no longer need to make senseless remarks about how thoughts of a bygone age cannot be relevant or that the language of the ancients cannot be used unless we use contemporary language to express their insights and so forth. Haven't we been doing essentially that? Yes, but in order to reconstruct and then reclaim the living insight of that thought which might very well involve using the same old concepts because they now provide us practical knowledge. If they do what is the objection against using, say, *atman*, *upadhi*, *adhyasa*, and *dharma*, especially since without their help we may not be able to overcome the logical and categorial error.<sup>9</sup>

Even from the little we have been able to achieve through the categorial shift, we can glimpse how to construct the series involving *atman pratyaya* in different domains—interior or exterior—with the help of *atman/upadhi* pair. *Adhyasa* as a logical error or flaw in practical deliberation results when *atman* is entangled in or arrested by *upadhi*. This dynamic conceptual

movement is the movement of self-consciousness or form-consciousness, and in that movement, we represent ourselves as apprehtender of forms, however inarticulate or inchoate that representation may remain; we are in that sense never cognitively homeless.<sup>10</sup> That is why some Indian traditions talk about *pratyabijnana* (re-cognizing what is always known), self-knowledge as always implicit and available and others about aimlessness, sign-lessness, and self-lessness of knowledge (Nhat Hanh, 2012: 348–50). Philosophical life is thus given to us—the only question is how skillful and articulate we become in extending it to incorporate all aspects of life as learnable and linked to happiness (Dhareshwar, 2019). I remarked in the preface that my reaching this understanding, my trajectory, has a unity that underwrites the thematic unity of this book. This is the appropriate place to pause to narrate the unity of my intellectual trajectory before resuming the account of how practical reflection can resist normativity.

### Detour and Retour (Return): Reflections on a Personal Trajectory

How do I locate my personal trajectory within the practical epistemology developed here and how will it orient my reflection on where I am now, what practice my action can initiate? Let me deliberately use the “study groups” I have been part of as a reference point, since they have been my sites of learning! In my teens, I was part of a Marxist study group, which thought of itself as a revolutionary political group. It had a more or less ready self-understanding derived from the history of left movements in Russia and Europe. I have no doubt that I received the kind of intellectual training and socialization that I would not get in that concentrated form in any conventional undergraduate institution anywhere (which college or university would make possible an intensive study of Marx’s *Capital*?). The same process also initiated, in an equally concentrated way, a process that I would later term *detour*, which involved seeing the metropolis as a repository of everything valuable culturally and intellectually, even though Marxian critique of capitalism made one talk about exploitation of the colonies. Culturally, the colonies had nothing to offer; they needed to undergo revolutionary transformation even to be modern. Of course, the process of *detour* gets initiated in any setting, no matter what one happened to study, especially if you lived in big cities of the formerly colonized nations. This was a common intellectual trajectory of post-colonial intelligentsia, as I would soon learn when I began my graduate work while physically undergoing the *detour* in the US. Using the metaphor of *detour/retour*—taken from the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant (1981: 36)—I examined the trajectory of detour that post-colonial writers seem destined to go through, speculating what detour could mean or require. Using the grand name of narrative epistemology, I wanted to think of *retour* as something more than a slogan (Dhareshwar, 1989a). Perhaps the understanding of *detour* wasn’t deep enough to begin searching for the terms in which *retour* or return could be thought of. Although I had read Edward

Said's *Orientalism* and was part of a group studying colonial discourse, the understanding of colonialism and its relationship to orientalism remained fairly superficial. Consequently, when I did return to India, it was not to be the intellectual *retour* that one was seeking. Far from it. Without having the equipment to really analyze the nature of orientalist discourse (which as it turns out even Said himself really did not understand) and with only a "political" criticism of colonialism, my understanding of India remained roughly what it was during the Marxist group days, namely, a feudal caste-ridden society that needed to seek modernity, even though by now the Marxian route to that end was seen as unrealizable and perhaps even undesirable. I even produced an essay titled "Caste and the secular self" (Dhareshwar, 1993) which argued that the middle class has repressed caste so much that what, in Clifford Geertz's terms, should have been an "experience-near" concept has been turned into an "experience-distant" concept (Geertz, 1983: 57–58)! Though the language was the then "cool" post-structuralism, the content remained the same colonial/orientalist "critique" of "the caste-system."<sup>11</sup> It couldn't be otherwise since contempt, open or concealed, for Indian traditions and practices prevented even an awareness of ignorance about India. Despite a deep dissatisfaction with Marxism and Marxism-inspired distrust of Liberalism and nationalism, there was simply no curiosity about Indian traditions and their intellectual resources. There could not be too since the only understanding we had of them came from the West, thus setting up a vicious circle from which it seemed there was no way out. Those seeking indigenous counterparts to Western theories (Indian theory of state, Indian theory of rights) were quickly dubbed "nativist" and dismissed. Besides, they were in any case so crude, they could not possibly provide the resources to understand what was really a predicament. Even someone like Ashis Nandy, who did try to raise questions about colonialism—demanding to know why our understanding of colonialism too is borrowed from the West—could not quite provide a way out of the predicament partly because of the non-systematic, anecdotal nature of his writing, but mostly because his anti-modernity attitude was I think unpalatable; it wasn't clear what that implied (though his anti-science and anti-modernity rhetoric had some buyers, resonating as it seemed to with such fashionable post-60s rhetoric associated with Feyerabend et al.). But, in truth, no one really wanted to see where Nandy's anti-Western stance would lead to because no one really wanted to give up on the West; so, there was and still is incoherent talk about alternative modernities, indigenous modernities, etc. Though not everyone saw this as a predicament, the incoherencies, the disorientations, the eclecticism that was expressive of the predicament was/is evident in the writings of post-colonial theorists, historians, and political theorists. My grappling with these issues took the route of investigating the history–sovereignty link and interrogating what the "post" in the post-colonial did or could mean (Dhareshwar, 1995a, 1995b). However, such vague questionings and exploration did not have the conceptual potential to crystallize into a coherent inquiry.

It's in this situation that I encountered *Heathen* (Balagangadhara, 1994) and reencountered Balagangadhara, who thus became a twice-born teacher, having first helped me with Marxism and, in particular, *Capital*. It's no exaggeration to say that some of us have yet to get over the excitement created by the absolute novelty, the power, and the rigor of this work. Its immediate impact—surprisingly perhaps given its intricate structure—was at an intuitive level. Its thesis about religion had a certain feeling of rightness, achieving a deep clarification of intuitions one didn't even know one had. Intellectually, its story about the West helped arrange one's unsystematic and eclectic acquaintance with Western intellectual history into an intelligible and coherent pattern. One finally began to form an understanding of the West, instead of simply reproducing its self-descriptions or getting lost in its complex intellectual traditions and debates. *Heathen* is of course a book about the West primarily, but it had tangible implications for understanding India too. It powerfully explained how the existing social sciences, and, more pertinently, the social scientific descriptions of India were unacceptable because they were developing secularized Biblical themes as science. And it made much better sense of Said's *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) than Said himself or the whole host of post-colonial academics who used his work ever could. This had the effect of finally opening up access to Indian culture, toward which one had only contempt, without one realizing the source of that contempt. The euphoria it created undoubtedly had to do with the fact that both intellectually and intuitively it stirred up a movement toward genuine decolonization of the mind.<sup>12</sup> It did so not emotionally or politically but by building a theory about West as a culture and by inviting the others, whether from the West or from Asia/India, to join as research crew in the on-going enterprise of building a comparative science of cultures, which would initiate a totally fresh understanding of India and its traditions and practices. (It's possible that our initial enthusiasm for the work made some of us behave a bit like the followers of the other book and may have put off many who were curious about its claims but were deterred by the attitude that implied they must be daft not to see the novelty and importance of the book right away and volunteer themselves immediately as research crew.)

Thus began my participation in the second “study group” which saw itself as executing a research program, in the way philosophy of science construed that term. Everything undertaken there was new, starting with the notion of science, theory-building, and collaborative work. Research work was thought of in a way that was far removed from the humanities or social scientific work that one was familiar with. Certainly, the idea of doing science wasn't easily understood, partly because of the inherited prejudice against “science” and partly because it required the kind of disciplined thinking that was alien to the training that students in graduate programs in humanities and the social sciences received. The sophisticated and self-conscious sense of scientific activity that *Heathen* practiced and required had nothing in common with the popular misconceptions about doing science. It could be safely said

though that perhaps quite a few scholars recoiled from *Heathen* just because of its self-description as science despite finding its claims attractive. All these novelties made research both exciting, daunting, and a little frustrating too. The last because *Heathen* was such a powerful work in terms of its explanatory potential, all that the crew seemed to do for quite some time (or perhaps even now!) was merely infer or make explicit what *Heathen* implied. So, secularism debate in India was shown to be misplaced, theological roots of concepts such as rights were laid bare and diagnosed as the reason for the hollowness of their peculiar employment in India, the process of secularization in the West was shown to be the reason European intellectuals too had begun to have uncertain and uncomprehending relation to their own conceptual world, and so forth.

For me personally, the genuine moment of insight arrived when I was able to connect the secularization movement with Balagangadhara's insight about the absence of moral "ought" in Indian or non-Western languages. Combining the two meant broadening the thesis about moral norms into a larger cultural argument that could explain how entities such as "the caste-system" in India and "sexuality" in the West have the same origin, as it were. The general claim could be formulated as: ontologically peculiar entities are homologous. It was one thing, however, to have the insight and another thing altogether to figure out the conceptual structures needed to fully explain the insight. Not an unusual situation in scientific theorizing, one told oneself, though it was cold comfort when it seemed to take forever to make the case. But the insight was inspiring enough to sustain debate, discussion, and teaching at great intensity and excitement.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, for me here at last was a glimpse of what *retour* (return) could mean and require, though the route was entirely unexpected!

As I struggled to discover or invent the structures necessary to make my insight theoretically acceptable and draw its possible ramifications, I also turned to Indian material and traditions to see what insights they hold out and how one can access them, now that the normativity argument had shown me that the contempt for Indian practices and traditions had their roots indeed in normativity. Also, as I noted above, *Heathen* had a great deal of intuitive, experiential plausibility, and necessarily so given its hypothesis linking learning and culture in an integral way. While it was stimulating to approach, say, the *Vacana* tradition, in a post-*Heathen* frame, and try to grapple with their concepts and distinctions,<sup>14</sup> such as *anubhava* and *anubhaava*, it was also becoming depressingly clear that the secular version of *praeparatio evangelica* has all but swallowed up India's traditions. The extraordinary violence of colonialism could only be imagined when one realizes that the access to both our present and the past has been rendered extremely difficult if not impossible. Turning to Gandhi was both reassuring and inspiring because he, more than anyone else before him or after him, understood the violence that colonialism had unleashed on Indian culture, but he, again more than anyone else before or after him, found the cultural

resources to resist colonial violence. I formulated the idea of cognitive enslavement to make sense of our predicament and postulated the idea of two frames, the frame of practical mode of being in the world and the quasi-theoretical/normative frame that renders our present and our past inaccessible by norming the practices and traditions without which there is no ethical learning or practical mode of life, since the ethical and the practical are co-extensive in Indian culture. The frames idea, though it seemed, on the face of it, *ad hoc* postulation, was needed to argue that the practical mode of understanding is still active in the present but mute; and when it seeks to articulate itself, it ends up distorting and obscuring itself because it has to reach out to some existing idiom, political or otherwise, that is normatively cast.<sup>15</sup> To some extent, even Gandhi could not escape it. After all, he did not have the kind of knowledge about the West that *Heathen* provides. He perhaps did not even entertain the possibility that we could theorize cultures in this way, his own commitment taking the form of revitalizing practical thought in his *ashram*, preparing *satyagrahis* to set up sites of learning. This raises a very fundamental question about how we understand colonialism and colonial violence. Yes, colonialism is unethical but what is the source of the deep and long-lasting violence? Is it colonialism or normativity? One could grant that colonialism played a very powerful role in imposing and perpetuating normativity on Indian culture, but conceptually, they need to be kept distinct. There is a parallel here in the way one used to formulate the question about the relationship between orientalism and colonialism. We could also quickly summarize this discussion by asking whether cognitive enslavement and colonial consciousness are the same thing?

This concern with accessing the past and, if you like, valorizing the present clearly brought home the need to have some understanding of practical knowledge or at least practical form of life. My preoccupation with giving an account of how normativity produces ontologically peculiar entities like “the caste-system” and “sexuality” too had converged on the need to develop a richer understanding of practical knowledge and practical form of life. And that is one thing *Heathen* and subsequent writing of Balagangadhara has the least to say about. It would be an understatement to say that it is under-described. Less provocatively or more soberly put, to the extent science/theory is empirical or observational at its core, it cannot comprehend *phronetic* or practical knowledge, without turning the latter into an “entity” of some kind. The insight into scientific theorizing that made possible the astounding *Heathen* had to do with the depth at which its author grasped the lesson that all facts are facts of a theory and that concepts acquire their meaning only in a theory. It’s an attitude that entertains zero-tolerance policy toward “factoids” of any kind. This attitude has served admirably as long as the object remains religion in its nature as ur-theory (and here I am venturing a thesis that needs much deeper consideration than I can give at the moment, but see the last section). When we turn that attitude to understand the possibility of self-consciousness and self-knowledge, the result is bound to be disastrous. It

would require that without theorizing, the “I” is a factoid, that we see ourselves as factoids, which we get rid of through theorization encapsulating or permeating all “facts” about “me.” To make the same point in another way by mixing up the terms of theory with the idiom of Indian thought: *upadhi* is not a factoid; *atman/upadhi* cannot be mapped onto theory/fact. Persisting with theorization when practical knowledge is at issue would be to turn science into scientism. This scientism would be a theoreticist error, dislocating agents from their self-consciousness, rendering them cognitively homeless.<sup>16</sup> I wonder if in this *Heathen* research program is unwittingly following the object of its theorization, namely, religion, which in its ur-theoretical drive toward moralizing the world dislocates people from their practices by norming those practices.

There is an oblique awareness that the relentless theory-talk could be misleading, to the extent that the research program is often referred to as a “story.” It remains to be seen whether that’s anything more than a *facon de parler*. (If it were to be anything more, many of the claims of the program will have to be revised, including its thought about the relationship between practical reflection and theory). However that may be, in Thompson’s practical epistemology, we have found the sketch of a practical form of life that supplies the necessary conceptual structure to understand the emergence of ontologically peculiar entities; by doing so and by enabling us to reconstruct and reemploy the categorial structure of Indian thought, we can begin resisting normativity by inventing ways of practically engaging with our present. The new practitioners that emerge in this process hold out ethical possibilities for not only India, for practice emerges as the unity or nexus of sites of learning and form-concepts. As Gandhi often said about *satyagraha*, any practice becomes an exemplar.

With that I am already drawn into the reflective possibilities for my present stage or *ashram*! The first “study group” readily found its form as a revolutionary, political group, outside the orthodox Left parties. The second self-consciously sought to fashion itself as a scientific research group carrying out a research program. My own trajectory through them has led me to the conviction that revitalizing and developing the practical mode of life has to be through a decolonized understanding of Indian traditions and by the intellectual resources provided by them. The last two chapters sketched an outline of how I see the project today, and the second section above tried to elaborate that while briefly expressing my understanding of the shortcomings of the *Heathen* program. As we try to find our way to re-understand or seek a decolonized (meaning here freed from the normative zone) access to Indian traditions and experiences, the form of activity we seek cannot be either the revolutionary praxis of the first or the scientific research program of the second which seeks to theorize practice. Its idiom and its activity will have to be drawn from multiple domains of practical life, forming overlapping and nested practitioners. Perhaps a radically new version of Gandhi’s *ashrama* or maybe something like the *anubhava mantapa* of the 12th century *vachanakaras*?

### Resisting Normativity

We will have to see what evolves, but whatever it is, it will have to self-consciously seek a form for itself even as it tries to become adept at handling and understanding the form-concepts of Indian thought. This thought clearly saw inquiry into living itself as the proto-type of all inquiries, which is accessible to everyone; and the inquiry or self-inquiry is meant to generate insights into the structure of inquiry itself: what I termed the *atman-upadhi pratyayas* initiates a movement that brings to self-consciousness interior and exterior form-concepts, that clarify and enrich my experience while showing why *adhyasa* is an ever-present possibility as an error, arresting or blocking the inquiry. The inquiry then is equally about how to remove the obstruction and overcome the error. One source of the error emerges from the dualities that I am presented with or caught in. How to deal with dualities of various kinds? Would discovering and reflecting on my *dharma* in whatever *ashrama* I am help? Notice that here *dharma* is a form-concept that applies as much to the *phases* of interiority, *antahkarana* (*chitta, buddhi, manas, ahamkara*), as it does to the *stages* of exteriority, to *varnashrama*. I believe dualities have been misunderstood as dualism (say as substance dualism so familiar in Western philosophy), but dual of relation or construction is something altogether different, as should be evident if we think of *maya* as dual of *atman*, something (in my) present I have to deal with in the inquiry. When Allama says “I means *maya*” and “you means ignorance,” his inquiry is figuring out the unity of the disparate judgments that involve the predicate *maya*. That inquiry or reflection also involves asking why *hennu, honnu*, or *mannu* are considered *maya* when it is the *manasa mundina ase* that is *maya*. The latter then helps clarify the more difficult judgment involving “I” and “you.”<sup>17</sup>

It is evident that *upadhi* does not designate a class of entities; rather, it marks the slot or position, by occupying which words or signs become form-concepts, as we discussed earlier. How did Indian traditions discover or invent them, how did they transmit them? In what ways the discourses, the stories, the reflections of *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and *Mahakavyas*, the *Vacanas*, do that? We have very little idea, thanks to the stultifying colonial/orientalist picture of them as “Hindu religion.” It’s nothing more than just a modest beginning to restore the properly logical character of that thought, as a first approximation. We have a long way to go before we fully understand all the dimensions of that thought, the concepts it developed to make possible living as a form of inquiry, the conditions it envisaged to enable and sustain living by generating insights. Insight about what? About how to avoid *adhyasa*. I have slipped into talking about Indian thought in the singular though there were multiple traditions for the simple reason that they fundamentally shared that conception of living as inquiry, as achieving and sustaining insight across domains of life. Given this concern, it would be a crucial and delicate task for them to figure out how to construct the hospitable structures or sites needed to make that life flourish. What we think of as arrangements of social life, *samaaj*, had to include sites of learning so that

*samsara* or its counter-part *prapancha* could be negotiated without it becoming a trap. Temples are I suppose an obvious example of such a site, but practices as ritualized actions were themselves such sites or medium for transmitting reflections and insights. Indeed, the concern about the performance of ritual as knowledge has to be seen as a concern about how best to achieve insight. Whatever knowledge is, it must at least be a capacity to yield insight, which can be expressed in either proposition or action.<sup>18</sup> Can the performance of ritual enable insight? If they do, is it by embedding the action equivalent of form-concepts? That is to say, we have to see ritual as an action equivalent of proposition which embeds form-concepts.

Let's reflect for a moment on how *vachanakaras*, especially Allama, makes use of *sutaka*.<sup>19</sup> They often ask themselves if speech/word can be *sutaka*, while at the same time affirming that speech is/can be *jyotirlinga*. Commonly, *sutaka* is practiced during birth and death. When we see the latter in the light of the former, we glimpse the insight that links *sutaka* to what has the potential to engender *maya*. Because birth and death are “phenomena” that mask experience, *sutaka* is what we observe to understand that masking, our being in the grip of *maya*, and to reflectively achieve an insight about *maya* itself.<sup>20</sup> What may seem like a metaphorical usage of *sutaka* and *enjalu* (“*shabdavembene? Shrotrad enjalu..... Nanenmbene? Arivinenjalu...*”)<sup>21</sup> in *vacanas* actually throws light on the ill-understood phenomenon that anthropology has dubbed “purity and pollution” and wasted vast acres of trees explaining it. It's not merely that practical knowledge as self-consciousness of forms require sites or pauses, if you like, to not to be taken in by the *upadhis*, but any of them can be both insightful and *enjalu/sutaka/mailige* (or in contemporary parlance bullshit). This is clearly not a justification of such practices but a suggestion about exploring the insight that provides the link between *sutaka* and *maya*, on the one hand, and the structure of *phronetic* knowledge, on the other. Social reform discourse and anthropology have by now rendered the whole thing some disgust inducing, discriminatory stuff! In any case, what we need to rescue is the insight that links practices such as *sutaka* with *maya*. Realizing perhaps that these practices no longer work as reflective pauses, Gandhi for one sought to device new set of practices in his *ashram*, the most spectacular one with which he sought to involve the whole country being the practice of *charka*.

Another important lesson we need to learn from Gandhi is his imperviousness to the normative discourse of politics based on equality, freedom, and rights; he regarded them as, at best, simply impertinent, or, at worst, as potentially violent ideology in the service of social engineering. Articulating instead the idea of *swaraj*, he sought to both root it in and make it sustain the practical mode of living. The situation today is in many ways grimmer than it was when Gandhi was leading the movement against colonial rule. For one thing, Indians themselves have become so parasitic on politics and the disguised normativity of social scientific discourse that they are perpetuating the experience-occluding structures of the colonial era. Gandhi was absolutely right in maintaining that the strengthening of the practical life was the only

non-violent as well as the most effective way of resisting the incursion of normativity. The question is, what does that require? When the concept-of-itself governed processes have either disappeared or distorted or replaced entirely by the so-called social scientific discourse on caste and tradition, we will require a theoretical understanding of the dynamics that has brought about this state of affairs. Since the West claims to be offering theoretical understanding of both itself and other cultures, and since it is these theoretical descriptions that seem, in part at least, to be creating the obstacles for the practical form of life to exist and develop properly, we need a meta-theory of these Western theories to figure out why this theoretical enterprise ends up distorting its object, rather than providing an understanding of it. The theory of double dynamic of religion that *Heathen* develops provides the resources for understanding how theological concepts—sovereignty and rights, for example—and entities—free will, conscience, *ecclesia*, etc.—shaped Western culture, and how without theology as the background theory, none of the concepts and problematics of moral, political, and even social theory would really make sense. Troublingly, however, this theory has no explanation of what happens to practical knowledge in the process of secularization. The practical epistemology sketched in this chapter showed that when theory or theoretical knowledge tries to substitute itself for practice and practical knowledge, the outcome is that norms begin to displace forms.

Let us first contrast this normativizing engagement with the world with how the practical epistemology of Indian thought deals with *samsara/prapancha* and then see how the former would interpret the latter. As we saw earlier, the *atman/upadhi pratyayas* help us avoid *adhyasa*, which we said is a logical error.<sup>22</sup> *Upadhis* are not disowned, they are not things, worldly or otherwise. As Shankara says: kingdom is an *upadhi* for a king and the shield is an *upadhi* for a warrior; if they don't exist, there's neither king nor soldier (*Vivekachudamani*, #244). Both the king and the warrior need to reflect on the *upadhi* and their *dharma*; perhaps they do so by regarding the *upadhis* as *sutaka*, something that potentially masks their experience. Suppose they periodically abstain from all kingly or warriorly activities and stop interacting with everyone. Enter moral theory in the form of missionaries or anthropologists or orientalist scholars interpreting this activity and seeking its justification in some texts: they will not only moralize kingship and warriorhood as part of “the caste-system,” they will see the *sutaka* they are observing as carrying out some immoral activity dictated by the false religion of Hindus, and once they see a pattern in the activity of undertaking *sutaka* or *madi*, they will indeed recognize the immoral phenomenon of “untouchability.” And theologically interpreted, *atman/upadhi* becomes soul/body, a religious doctrine of the Hindus, whose falseness gradually disappears as the interpretive structures secularize! Of course, even in the secularized world of academia, the musty air of religiosity still clings to those concepts, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the devout natives and industrious academics peddling the discipline Indian philosophy.

When we see normativity as a moral theory of the practical domain, we see why it must disregard or devalue forms and form-concepts. It is individuals and individual acts that are immoral. However, the crucial point is that in practical judgment *predicates relate to forms, not to individual variables* (Thompson, 2008: 78). The “normative experience” that the moral language substitutes for experience is therefore necessarily experience-occluding. The secular enterprise of morality then is both a ceaseless search for the source normativity and an attempt to substitute the language of moral norms for human practical experience which is shaped by the determinations of *a priori* form-concepts. It’s the latter that holds together or makes inseparable reflection and experience. Normativity insulates reflection from experience.

Moral norms and discourses disregard, suppress, and deform practical knowledge in their attempt to substitute themselves for it. Since practical life involves both interiority and exteriority, normativization encompasses both the forms that organize the interior experience (think of Kant’s notion of moral self with its division between duty and inclination or the contemporary imperative to submit to the gender/sexuality spectrum) and the forms that structure the exterior experience (think of protestant ethics in the domain of economy). For secularization also involves development of scientistic discourses which provide “truths,” for both the interior and the exterior world, on which to act. Scientism and ideology, as we will see, are two sides of the same coin and both become rampant when practical knowledge gets subjugated. Of course, subjugated and submerged, practical knowledge cannot entirely disappear, for action requires it, but increasingly, it survives despite normative discourses of all variety trying to supplant it. Indeed, we can go so far as to say that if there is any kind ethicality remains in the world, it is because of the submerged and subjugated practical knowledge rather than because of morality or the normativized discourse of humanities and the social sciences.

It’s important to draw out the consequences of displacing or deforming practical knowledge: unchecked theoretical speculation resulting in scientism, on the one hand, and rabid mushrooming of ideologies of all kind, on the other. Quasi-scientific or scientistic discourse on “sexuality” (including Freud’s psychoanalysis), what Foucault termed *scientia sexualis*, is a clear example of theoretical knowing substituting itself for practice and practical knowledge. Marx’s theory of fetishism could be seen as showing how the practical domain of economy too is subject to this process. In his later works, Michel Foucault was raising similar questions about both economy and politics. At the other end, the lacunae left by practical knowledge and knowing begins to be filled in by a plethora of what can only be termed ideologies, pragmatic clubbing together of ideas from anywhere providing now the *justification for action*. Indeed, the very popularity of pragmatism as a philosophical theory could be seen as a symptom of the loss of the active dimension of practical thought. Instead of the reflection on form-concepts and concept-of-itself governed processes that are inseparable from action, we now have the demand for justification of action. This demand arises out of a

violent dislocation in the functioning of practical knowledge that we described above; it's this violence that gives rise to modern politics and which it, whether the right or left, replicates. Gandhi's aversion to politics and his practice of non-violence was at its core a response to this violence. In this work, I bring together all the important reflections on practice—Nietzsche, Marx, Wittgenstein, Foucault, from the West, and Gandhi, Tagore, and Balagangadhara from India—to foreground the centrality of practical form of life. What this assembling and inter-articulation has enabled me to do is give multiple resonance to the notion of practice—the spectrum begins with Wittgenstein's metaphor of practice as a river with actions as river-bed, incorporates Gandhian sites of learning, and extends to Thompson's "form-concept." I would argue that the combining of sites of learning and form-concepts gives us a rich notion of practice or, to use my term, practice. It allows for both a radical conceptual reconstruction of Indian sociality and a possibility of present intervention. I think we are now in a position to perceive how violence of normativity is what breaks up practices: Gandhi grasped this at the deepest level and proposed building and sustaining practices as the only way to overcome that violence. It has often been pointed out that Indian classical music is an example of syncretism (fusion of beliefs). I think that is a misdescription; classical *raaga* music is a prime instance of how sites of learning combine with form-concepts, a practice in my sense. Indian traditions engaged in practical reflection to encapsulate different domains in practices. I believe such practices can be reconstructed from those domains too; can we, then, begin to elaborate research itself as practice, where discovery/invention of form-concepts takes a life of its own and link up with other practices to form a matrix?

From the practical epistemology underlying Indian thought, it might seem that the concepts of normative political theories (say, sovereignty, citizen, equality, rights), the theoretical entities and postulates of moral and social theories (self, will, belief, race, class or nation, for example) are examples of *adhyasa*. While a closer attempt to discern how that might have seemed to be the case will no doubt show that these concepts and entities cannot be understood by the structures of practical knowledge that explains how *adhyasa* comes about as an error, nevertheless the process that creates such concepts and entities shows the *exclusion* of precisely the forms and form-concepts that makes *adhyasa* a removable error or mistake. That is to say, the practical epistemology that enables reflection to regard *adhyasa* as a logical error or as a flaw in practical deliberation offers resources to resist normativity, even though practical reflection itself cannot form an understanding of the phenomenon of normativity and the mechanism of its spread. Because theory completely disregards form-concepts or treats them as concepts-in-a-theory and norms colonize the domains structured by forms by occluding the latter, we end up with ontologically peculiar entities that occlude experience rather than *upadhis* that may only momentarily mask experience. The meta-theory of Western theories that seeks to explain how the latter deploys these concepts

and posits these entities is, then, at the same time an indirect explication of practical knowledge as form-consciousness. It cannot, however, take the place of practical or experiential reflection. It would not perhaps be inappropriate, then, to term such a metatheoretical activity—which has to be part of the effort to both revitalize practical forms of life and to resist normativity—such an activity, a practical critique.

Concept-of-itself governed processes (Thompson, 2013: 731) are extremely crucial for practical or *phronetic* action because my inquiring act must seek the form and understand or represent itself as doing so in whatever inchoate terms such a reflection takes place.<sup>23</sup> Different Indian traditions impart this learning in diverse ways, using whatever heuristics they deem appropriate and effective. Attaining such insight and sustaining it in a domain or even across domains, finding resources to remove the errors and obstacles, and seeking out new forms, that activity is what I call the practical mode of engaging the world, *samsara* or its counter-part, its dual in another sense, *prapancha*.<sup>24</sup> What is unacceptable to the Indian traditions is that, in the terms of the *vachanakaras*, I remain a *bhavi*, without practical knowledge reflectively transforming me into either a *jnana-yogi* or a *karma-yogi* or a *bhakti-yogi*. That is, I am cognitively indifferent to the forms whose uncovering or discovery or invention makes my actions ethical, my life rich and variegated. I am suggesting that those terms are not so alien or unintelligible; they are so many different paths to form practical modes to insightfully live a philosophical life. Today, whether we are politicians or academics, bureaucrats or journalists, we are forced to be *bhavis* because the practical or *phronetic* reflections, the judgments made at different levels of practical forms, are no longer available and we seem unaware that we need them; instead, we have to choose to be nationalist by flying a flag on the roof-top, identify with a caste, search for the pronoun that adequately and empirically locates me at any given moment in the sex–gender spectrum, and so on. To construct another kind of example: I once misread some passages in Gandhi's writings as giving a justification for nationalism (and the Partition); I thought Gandhi seemed to imply that the *sanatana dharma* he admired so much needed the protection of a nation because it was in one sense only to be found in a limited geographical place. I was of course wrong and Gandhi never said or implied any such thing though one could justifiably make a case for it which is more subtle and nuanced than saying an ethnic group needs its own nation. But by the terms of what he called the *sanatana dharma* that would be committing *adhyasa*, the inquiry becoming vicarious and degenerating into ideology. Recognizing that error and protesting against it in order to correct is what the *satyagrahi* did in whatever domain it happened. Sites of learning are needed precisely to recognize and overcome *adhyasa*. Gandhi's *ashrama* or Allama's *anubhava mantapa* are places of inquiry and practical reflection that engages with the present, the *maya* in whatever domain, by construing it as a dual in order to overcome it. (It's interesting to note that Indian traditions talk about *non-dualism*, never the equivalent of monism.)

When I was first thinking of the metaphor *detour/retour*, a fellow graduate student and friend asked me if I was a nationalist. I was startled by that because until then nationalism was a term one used in academic discussions; it was not a term I could relate to while trying to figure out what *retour* could mean. However, I could not deny it either for in however a deformed way my thinking could be seen to be falling under it. Today, we are confronted with an extreme form of this nationalism, which Balagangadhara has rightly termed poisonous.<sup>25</sup> As I have already discussed above, when we confront normativized domains such as nationalism, “the caste-system,” the gender-sexuality norms,<sup>26</sup> or the past that is being rendered inaccessible by history (what I termed the secular *praeparatio evangelica*), the task of resisting normativity calls for a revitalization and development of practical mode of engagement that deals with the present by construing it as a dual to overcome it. If normativity reformulates our experience, we resist normativity by bringing reflection back to experience. I need not apprehend myself as say moral “self” or worry about what pronoun is appropriate to this time, this desire, this interaction, I don’t have to relate to my “nаду” or “деш” as a nation or through nationalism, the traditions which make my actions and practices the concept-of-themselves governed processes, in short my *past* are not to be understood as “history” or “religion,” my acting-together with others need not become “class” or “race.”<sup>27</sup> The imperatives these normed, experience-occluding structures carry are necessarily violent because they not only dislocate the form-concepts and forms from the action, but they also erase that process. The duality construction I am recommending seeks to resist the violence of that process; we can think of it in a way as reversing the norming process by uncovering and where necessary creating new forms and form-concepts, or, more precisely, practitions as the unity of form-concepts and sites of learning. Though that will require theorization, it must remain subordinate to the practical philosophical life. And since it is my claim that Indian thought abounds with form-concepts of all kinds and at all levels that were used for articulating a rich and diverse world, we resume rather than recreate the practical self-inquiry they were so adept at conducting. *The retour* or return, then, is the realization of always having been at home *practically*.

## Notes

- 1 Thompson introduces the adverb “anscombely” to dispel any misunderstanding that Anscombe’s phrase “intentional” might cause. By intentional, she emphatically does not refer to any “inner state” or “psychic event” but means to capture a logically distinctive process—“a genuine material process” as Thompson puts it—that accompanies specifically non-observational knowledge (Thompson, 2013: 714).
- 2 I’m reformulating and extending Thompson’s thought:

So it is with the knowledge by observation of another’s particular intentional action as such: in it I commit myself to the actuality and possibility of a knowledge of the same matter of particular fact, the same ‘happening,’

that is formally quite different from my knowledge of it. I empirically know the event precisely as not known by its agent.

(Thompson, 2013: 732)

- 3 See the helpful discussion in Magidor (2013) and Thomasson (2018).
- 4 This echoes a well-known passage on rule-following from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Departing radically from the long-standing tradition of reading the later Wittgenstein's work sociologically or anthropologically, Thompson suggests that "one of the lessons taught by Ludwig Wittgenstein... [is]...that we must recognize many intuitively more determinate distinctions of the sort Frege introduced" (Thompson, 2008: 27n4, emphasis original).
- 5 Some of you will no doubt recognize this as echoing Michel Foucault's formulation in his Tanner Lectures "*Omnès et Singulatim*: Toward a critique of Political Reason" (Foucault, 2002a 325).
- 6 In some of them, both the processes are at work. Thus, Marx's conception of history and theory of class is expressive of the dynamic of secularization even as his early reflections on practice and later theory of fetishism (reification and personification) afford deep insight into the process of secularization. Similarly, Max Weber (who, unfortunately, has not figured here at all) offers insight into norming of the domain economy in his work on Protestant Ethics (which wrongly gets read as a study in Protestant ideology), while his other works, especially on religion in China and India, end up as orientalist, that is, as expressive of the dynamic of secularization.
- 7 On the idea of "dual of," see Dhareshwar (2024). I think the idea of duality as dual of something will play a critical role in conceiving of the practical mode of engagement with the present.
- 8 I am provisionally using Bernard Williams' terms (Williams, 1985: 143–5) but within the logical horizon we are attempting here. To the two properties, therefore, we will have to crucially add a third, something like "form-specified."
- 9 We can dramatize the situation with Indian thought in this way: it took more than two millennia for logic to develop. That is startling enough but suppose it was the case that logic had already developed in Aristotle's time (that he had authored the Greek original of *Begriffschrift*) but we were still stuck in syllogism. I believe this to be the case with the practical knowledge developed by Indian thought. Indeed, one suspects we are not even in the syllogistic stage in relation to that knowledge.
- 10 I have taken the phrase from Williamson (2000).
- 11 Because of the drama surrounding this essay, I have finally written a note on it! See the appendix: "Revisiting 'Caste and the Secular Self'."
- 12 The idea is expressed with refreshing directness and simplicity in his later work:

We, from other cultures, know the West the way the West looks at itself. We study the East the way the West studies the East. We look at the world the way the West looks at it. *We do not even know whether the world would look different, if we looked at it our way.* Today, we are not in a position to make sense of the previous statement [...] The challenge that intellectuals from non-Western cultures face is nothing short of breathtaking: they must attempt to *decolonize the social sciences, no less.*

(Balagangadhara 2012a, 69, emphasis original)

As I say right at the beginning, this book is indeed my attempt to say how the world looks to us.

- 13 Some attempt has been made to capture these in an anthology (Ashwin Kumar and Dhareshwar forthcoming).

## 176 Conclusion

14 In an early attempt at engaging with the *Vacana* traditions (Dhareshwar, 2000), I had addressed two issues:

the first is relatively straightforward: are the existing social sciences the greatest obstacle to achieving an understanding of intellectual traditions such as the *vacana* movement? The second question is more complicated (and patently speculative): what if the object and method of inquiry that we find in the intellectual traditions such as the *vacana* movement are precisely what should form the basis of a science of the social that deserves its name?

The answer to the first question today is an even more emphatic yes; however, the second question and the answer, still affirmative, need much more nuancing in the light of practical epistemology advanced here. There is little doubt though that the concepts and inquiries undertaken in the *anubhava mantapa* of Allama Prabhu, Akkamahadevi, and Basaveshwara are part of our *past* and as such they actively shape our practical mode of engagement with the present (see below).

15 The frames, however, no longer appear *ad hocish* since they get a proper grounding in the practical epistemology advanced in this chapter.

16 It seems to me that the theoreticist error is at the heart of the picture Balagangadhara draws about the role of ignorance (*avidya*) as a practical notion and its relation to experience. Drawing on the analogy between immunization strategies used by scientists to defend their hypothesis from criticisms, anomalies, etc. and ignorance, Balagangadhara highlights the conflation that results between cognitive/explanatory scheme and the structure of experience. Knowing that the explanatory scheme is distinct from experience itself (whatever that is) doesn't seem to prevent this conflation because ignorance functions as a learning strategy, which is an evolutionary inheritance. This conflation is natural or inevitable in the way knowledge develops. Balagangadhara uses this picture to make the important point that when the cognitive scheme is normative, what results is experience-occlusion (Balagangadhara, 2001). From the point of view of the practical epistemology I'm working with, this is a deeply flawed picture of how humans live because the analogy simply cannot be made to work: what's the analog of theories/hypothesis and, from the other end, is experience to be seen as data? Of course, certain elusiveness has dogged his use of experience from the very early writing to the recent; I'm hoping the argument sketched in this chapter helps locate its source. If *avidya* is indeed a learning strategy, that function will have to be clarified within a practical epistemology of the kind this essay is working toward. And that wonderfully expressive phrase "experience-occluding structures" can be used to designate what results when quasi-theoretical/normative structures occlude or deform forms and break up practices in such a way that they no longer function as a unity of sites of learning and form concepts.

17 Here is a rough translation:

They say gold is maya; but gold is not maya  
They say woman is a maya; but woman is not maya  
They say the earth is maya; but earth is not maya

It is the desire before mind that is maya, Guheshwara (Allama, 2001: # 72). I thank Ashwin Kumar for help in translating the vacanas used in this chapter.

18 After decades of trying to solve the Gettier paradox, epistemologists seem content now to regard "knowledge" as a primitive concept (Williamson, 2000). However, when I use "knowledge," I am alluding to and trying to make explicit the conception of *atman* as *jnanasvaroopa*. It is the latter conception that is implicit in the idea of self-consciousness or form consciousness central to the phronetic epistemology underlying Indian thought.

- 19 The stimulus for writing this paragraph was provided by A.P. Ashwin Kumar's unpublished notes on the concept of untouchability.
- 20 Word or speech can be both expression of impurity (*sutaka*) and expression of the radiant *linga* itself.
- 21 "Enjalu" is literally saliva but used to designate impurity. Allama is using the metaphor of impurity to ask if "word" is the impurity if hearing, is "I" the impurity of "awareness" itself (Allama, 2001: #564).
- 22 The sense of logic involved here is much broader and richer than the Sellarsian/McDowellian "logical space of reasons." The sense we are trying to invoke might aptly be termed "logical space of practices."
- 23 Learning the temporality and generality of that space or process is crucial to build more determinate dimensions of practices. Certain actions have no discrete space or slice of time. The aspectual temporality has nothing to do with the temporality of time and tense. I'm doing *satyagraha* even though at the moment I'm playing chess or napping; I'm discharging my debt to my mother or my teacher, though no particular activity I'm doing—gardening or reading a novel—can be said to be instancing that.
- 24 Seeking out new forms is critical; even research and research out-put has to be self-consciously thought about and transformed.
- 25 The cheap trick of "*har ghar tiranga*" ("Tricolor in every home") seems to have made this poison readily acceptable and desirable. Balagangadhara has forcefully argued that the twinning of nationalism and history in Sangh Parivar's political agenda is catastrophic for the survival of Indian traditions (Balagangadhara, 2014).
- 26 This must surely be seen as the revenge of essentialism! If feminist discourse for long railed against essentialism, here we have a discourse on gender/sexuality embracing essentialism with normative zeal!
- 27 For a very early formulation, see Dhareshwar (2008).

# Appendix

## Re-visiting “Caste and the Secular Self”

Circa 2001 or 2002 I made public my views on normativity and “the caste-system” in a symposium in Heggodu (Karnataka). Balagangadhara gave what we called the direct argument showing why theoretically “the caste-system” does not make sense: there cannot possibly be a social system with the properties most generally ascribed to it—autonomy, stability, longevity, adaptability or flexibility, resilience, and decentralization—for only a “system” like “life” might display these properties (his argument could be construed as giving a *reductio* of the argument for “the caste-system.”) Mine we dubbed the indirect argument since it involved fairly complicated moves to show something like “the caste-system” and “sexuality” can only be the product of normativization. A blunt but not obviously unfair summary conclusion was that “the caste-system” does not exist. Imagine that! India and no caste-system! To most people, it seemed even more scandalous and outrageous than the declaration that religion does not exist in India—after all, it creates a nebulous image in most people’s mind whether they admire it or disdain it. But the caste-system, this most immoral and heinous practice we have all talked about, how can it not exist? Are you denying the cruelties, the contempt, etc. So went the reaction, naturally. In our enthusiasm, we had begun to call our talks Heggodu declaration, hoping, no doubt, it will give rise to not just hostility, which was to be expected, but curiosity, and eventually debate and inquiry. Looking back, it’s fair to say we only received hostility and were quickly isolated and de-platformed and the situation has seemed unlikely to change. My own academic reputation took a more serious hit (until then, there was skepticism about the choice I had made in subscribing to the Heathen research program). Now, I was rejecting my “Caste and the Secular Self” that had some sort of standing among the then political left. I think I understood the resistance and hostility. In fact, I always wanted to return to that essay and explain why it was perfectly intelligible and completely wrong-headed. However, the background work needed to make my new position could not be conveyed in a paper or two (but see Dhareshwar 2019), or even if I could, it would not have made sense to the readers who admired that essay and whose political identity almost exclusively rested on anti-caste stance. Given a semester’s time and a seminar

space, I could make most people see the power of my argument (not that they would necessarily embrace it for any number of not necessarily intellectual reasons).

A straightforward explanation, one that doesn't presuppose the argument made in this book, of the mistake committed by the essay would be to show how it mistook what really was experience-distant concept to be experience-near. Would that be like employing a social scientific term, say, kinship system, as experience-near and then arguing that it really is not? In the latter case, of course, there is indeed an experience-near term, let's say, relatives, whereas in the case of the former, there is no equivalent of the term "relatives." Orientalism would explain why such an entity came into being but would not quite explain why I was using it to understand my world. Nor why I used the expression "secular." My use of that term, setting aside the obvious sense in which it was inapplicable, was saying that the educated middle-class is trying to project itself as casteless, whereas in reality it was, so to speak, in denial. The present argument would make perspicuous how I, like most Indians, had been completely insulated from what we thought of as "traditional" India and its traditions and practices. The picture I was depicting was a product of the colonial enslavement. Furthermore, in using the term secular, I was betraying my ignorance of the West too: I was indeed the product of the "double-exclusion" I had tried to characterize in a literary critical essay on Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, when I was thinking about detour/retour (Dhareshwar 1989b). The present essay has the resources to offer a much deeper and more tragic sense to that term. The colonial/orientalist understanding of India has solidified and become cognitively impenetrable by the overlay on that of the contemporary normative stance transmitted by Western (the US being the major force) academia. An understanding of why the West and its "social sciences" and "humanities" produce experience-distant concepts or more accurately experience-occluding structures would require that the West tries to dispel its own ignorance. A case can be made that the humanities and the social sciences in Western (again especially the US) academia thrive on such double-exclusion and reproduce conditions for its perpetuation. The post-colonial Indian intelligentsia's experience is thus doubly insulated: they are not even aware that their understanding of India, even what they think of as *post-colonial*, is thoroughly colonial with not even a glimpse of the conceptual world of Indian thought and the ways it was transmitted visible anywhere in their work; on the other hand, they have no way to form an understanding of the West whose normative structures—transmitted by most humanities and social science disciplines (the latter reproducing the old staid orientalist attitude and the former the more fashionable woke speak)—they inhabit and reproduce. The condition of being doubly-excluded has many advantages and quite enjoyable too since it is rewarding in some parasitic sense. But it is experientially hollowed out and intellectually impoverished. One can only speculate what the outcome will be if that realization ever seeps through.

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